

STAR WARS

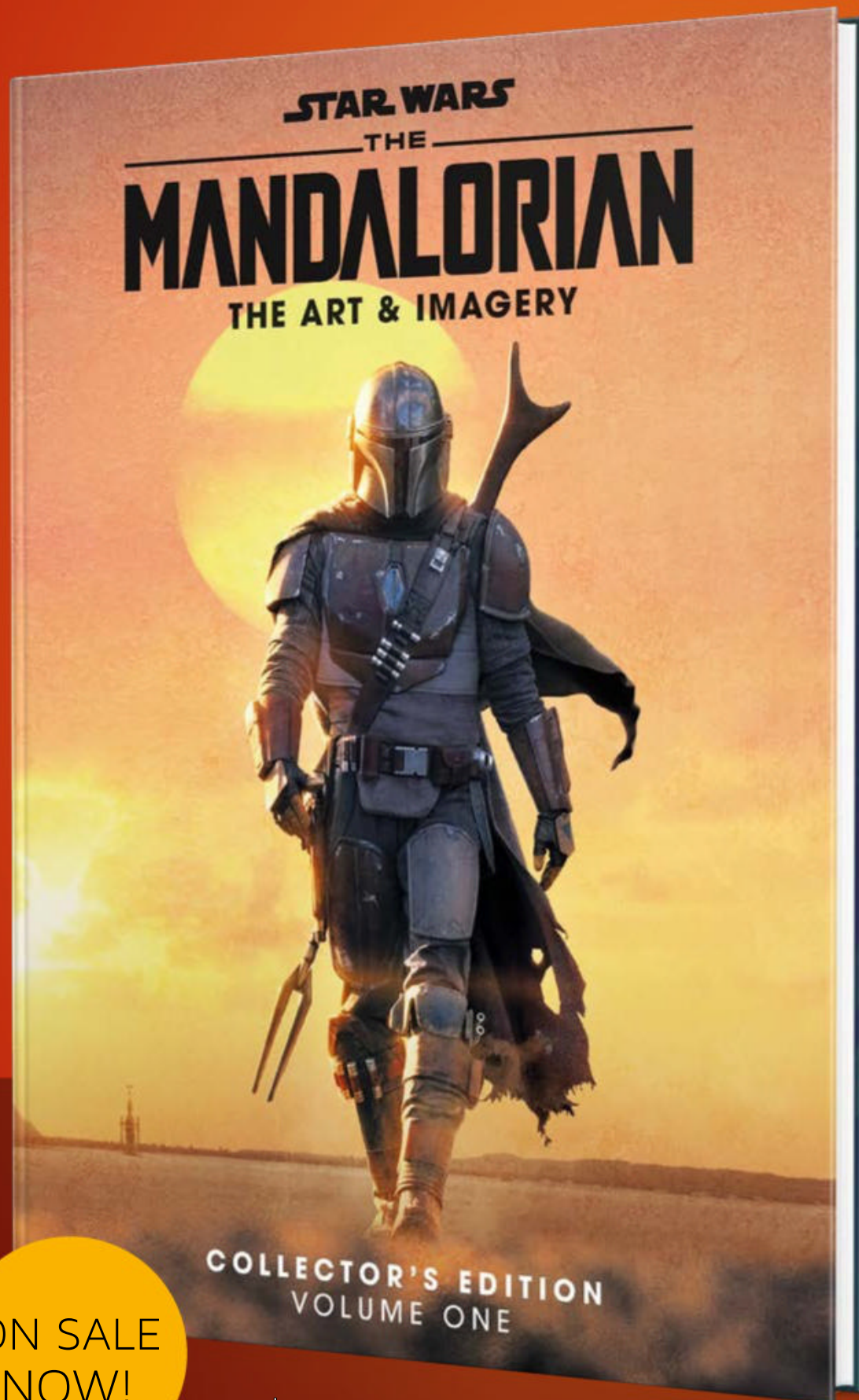
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CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Kogge, Darren Scott, Tricia Barr, Jay Stobie,
Mark Newbold, Jon D. Witmer, Tara Bennett,
Daniel Wallace, Craig Miller

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Lucy Goldsmith, Erich Schoeneweiss
at Random House, Holly McIntosh, Joseph
Taraborrelli, Andrea Towers and Jim Nausedas at
Marvel Comics, Lizzy Draeger, Tracy Cannobbio and
Chris Argyropoulos at Lucasfilm

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course, the movies at the core of the franchise.

Within these very pages you will find an interview
with the man who originally played Boba Fett, actor
Jeremy Bulloch; go on a trip with real-world scientists
as they take a look at the environments featured in the
Star Wars movies; and discover an in-depth chat with
artist extraordinaire Doug Chiang who talks about
pushing the boundaries of *Star Wars* design from
The Phantom Menace onwards.

Star Wars offers something for everyone, and
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Write to us

UNITED STATES
Star Wars Insider,
Titan Magazines,
2819 Rosehall
Lane, Aurora, IL,
60503, U.S.A.

UNITED KINGDOM
Star Wars Insider,
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LUKE SKYWALKER: HERO OF A SAGA

Michael Kogge looks at the 10 moments that made the original new hope a true hero

When the novelization of *Star Wars* was published in November 1976, six months before the motion picture's release, its cover featured the subtitle "From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker." At the time, readers might have found this peculiar, since few outside Lucasfilm had any idea who Luke Skywalker was. Nonetheless, the novel rocketed up the bestseller lists, and Luke's story began to be spread by word-of-mouth in science-fiction circles. One could say that even before the first frame of the film was projected in theaters, a hero was born in the popular imagination, and his legend has only grown in size ever since.

More than 40 years later, as *The Last Jedi* arrives to reveal more about the story of Luke Skywalker, it seems an appropriate time to reflect on his role in the *Star Wars* saga. Here are 10 "greatest moments" from his onscreen adventures, with some thoughts as to just why they are vital in showing his growth as a character—and as a hero.

10

BRINGING DOWN THE BEAST

After Luke's snowspeeder crashes during the Battle of Hoth in *The Empire Strikes Back*, he doesn't call it a day and rush to one of the evacuating transports. Instead, he takes the fight to a four-legged AT-AT walker and hauls himself up to its armored body via a tow cable. Slashing open the walker's underside with his lightsaber, Luke throws in a detonation charge that does what his snowspeeder's blaster

cannons could not: penetrates the AT-AT's armor and turns the clanking war machine into smoking trash from the inside out. While toppling the other walkers requires teamwork from the snowspeeder pilots, the very fact that Luke brings one down single-handedly—with such efficiency—demonstrates that he's a hero who thinks on his feet and has no fear of monsters, mechanical or otherwise.



09

DRAWING OF THE SWORD

Luke first holds a lightsaber in the home of Ben Kenobi. But it is not just *any* lightsaber, it previously belonged to Luke's father—Anakin Skywalker—who had wanted his son to have it when Luke was old enough, at least according to Ben. When Luke ignites the lightsaber, it marks the first time the original *Star Wars* audiences had witnessed a blue energy blade hiss into existence. Sound designer Ben Burtt mixed the whirr of an old movie projector with the hum from a television screen to give the laser sword a sense of weight as Luke swings through the air. Meanwhile, Obi-Wan adds a layer of history, explaining that the lightsaber is the weapon of the Jedi Knights, an order of mystical warriors who once defended peace



and justice through the galaxy. The blade looks and sounds so tangible, so real, and Luke seems so transfixed by it, that one never questions its authenticity or its legend. In this brief scene, both Luke and the audience realize the galaxy is a much bigger place than they had ever thought.

08

LUKE CONFRONTS
VADER AT BESPIN

Luke's first face-to-face cinematic confrontation with Vader has so much power because it's both a physical and a mental duel, and one that reveals much about both the original trilogy's hero and its key villain. "The Force is with you young Skywalker, but you are not a Jedi yet," Vader announces before languidly igniting his lightsaber. The two spar, but as the fight progresses, it becomes clear that Luke's nemesis has little intention of killing him. Instead, after maiming him, Vader gets inside Luke's head. Suddenly, the Dark Lord is talking in a way that we've never heard before; persuasively appealing to Luke to join him, even suggesting that the pair could work together for peace. Finally, with just four words, he changes everything. "I am your father." Luke is horrified by the revelation, but instinctively understands its truth. Rather than try to save his own life, however, Luke stands firm, choosing to leap towards, he believes, certain death, rather than choose the dark side.

07

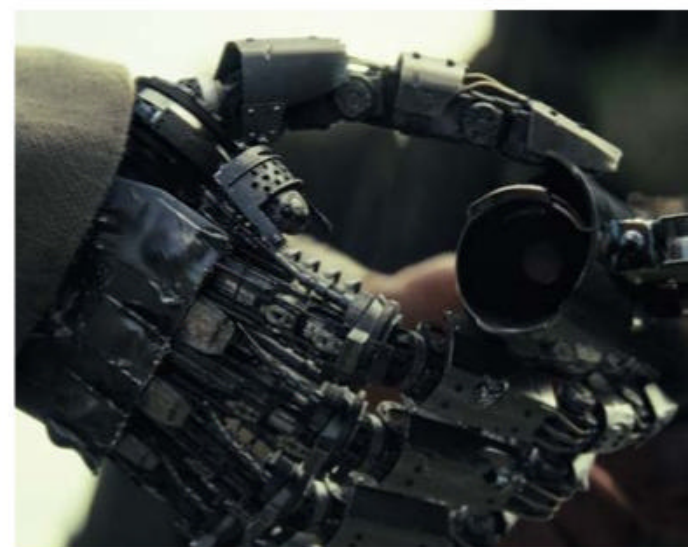
MAN IN BLACK

When Luke introduces himself in *Return of the Jedi*, he does so as a holographic message to Jabba the Hutt, declaring that he is "Luke Skywalker, Jedi Knight." He wears a sleek new uniform and speaks in a deliberate fashion, far from the brash kid we saw in *A New Hope*. Yet it's not until we see him for the first time in the flesh that the full extent of his change is realized. Luke strides into Jabba's palace as a silhouette dressed all in black. He dismisses the Gamorrean guards with a wave of his hand and calmly convinces Jabba's majordomo to give him an audience with the crime lord. Luke doesn't tremble in fear before the slimy Hutt. When he pulls back the hood of his cloak, Luke reveals a face that is slightly older, wiser, and almost serene—it is the face of a man who has accepted the mantle of a Jedi.



06

REY OF LIGHT

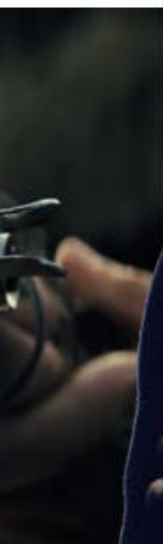


If *Return of the Jedi* introduces Luke Skywalker as a changed man, *The Force Awakens* introduces him as having changed again, in a scene that is perhaps the antithesis of his debut as a Jedi Knight in Jabba's palace. When Rey finds Luke at the end of the film, he is similarly cowed in a cloak, though underneath he wears dirty white garb in place of black. As he pulls back the hood, we see the skin graft is gone from his artificial hand, showing metal fingers, joints, and wrist plates. The face that's revealed is also decades older than before, coupled with a thin, graying beard and a mane of shaggy hair. This Luke is not the clean, sleek knight of his youth; now he is a worn and weathered older man, a solitary druid on the windswept island, Ahch-To. The film never reveals exactly what happened to him and neither does he utter a single word, but the sullen, confused look he gives the newcomer Rey is all we need to know that he has suffered—and he has changed.

05

THE PRINCESS AND THE PIT

Luke accomplished many physical feats in the classic *Star Wars* trilogy, often using the Force, but one particularly impressive use required a blend of quick-thinking, acrobatics, and a grappling hook. While being chased by stormtroopers on the Death Star, Luke and Leia come to a ledge that overlooks the battle station's central reactor shaft. Luke shoots the access panel to lower the blast door behind them, unintentionally destroying the controls for the shaft's extension bridge. As stormtroopers fire at them from the opposite ledge, Luke gives Leia his blaster rifle and unwinds the coil of his grappling hook. Before they swing across the shaft to safety, Leia gives Luke a peck on the cheek, "For luck," she says. This quick kiss from a princess is a big reward for Luke—he's now entered the ranks of swashbuckling heroes.



04

FRIENDS IN NEED



Luke was levitating equipment crates on Dagobah and listening to Jedi Master Yoda's encouragement when he had a sudden vision of his friends, Han Solo and Princess Leia, in peril in a city among the clouds. The vision broke his concentration and caused the crates to come tumbling down, R2-D2 with them. Despite warnings from Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi's ghost, Luke cuts short his Jedi training and flies off to Cloud City on Bespin. One never knows how powerful a Jedi Knight Luke may have become if he had stayed under Yoda's tutelage, but the choice he makes to go rescue his friends is the choice of a true hero. Friends and family are more important to him than anything else, including the Jedi path. He is willing to sacrifice his own life and destiny to ensure the destinies and lives of others. Of course, in doing so he encounters Darth Vader once again and discovers a shocking truth...



03

TATOOINE DREAMER



The most indelible image in all of the *Star Wars* films is that of a young Luke watching the binary sunset on Tatooine. Clouds pass over the pink-red orbs as they descend toward the horizon. It is a somewhat alien image for the audience, yet it is also an eerily familiar one. For how many of us have admired the beauty of the setting sun? How many of us have had thoughts about our place in this world—in this universe—as we contemplate nature? Perhaps most telling is the way Luke walks out to his perch: head down, shoulder slumped, feet kicking up dust. This is someone who goes to the sunset for refuge, feeling that no one understands him, especially his aunt and uncle. Though he may be stuck on a moisture farm on Tatooine, his desires and dreams stretch to the horizon, and to the suns and stars beyond. Luke knows he will never be at peace as a farmboy—he must become something else.

02

LIKE FATHER,
UNLIKE SON

Redemption is the overarching theme of *Return of the Jedi*: redemption of the Jedi, redemption of evil, redemption of those who have been terrible to us. Darth Vader is one of those seemingly irredeemable characters, a man who has perpetrated mass violence across the galaxy. Few in the audience would have protested if Luke had slain Vader, but Luke makes a different choice. He turns off his lightsaber and casts it aside. He refuses to bear the weapon of the Jedi, because by brandishing the blade he will continue the cycle of violence that has plagued the galaxy. Instead, he puts his faith in Anakin, sensing that there is still good inside the man who has done such great evil. And Luke is right—Vader turns on the Emperor and brings his reign to an end. But beyond this, Anakin's redemption reveals a deeper truth. For in order for Luke to redeem his father, he must do that very thing children often find it so hard to do: forgive their own parents.



01

ONE IN A MILLION



Luke comes out of *A New Hope* with a medal, friends, and a newfound celebrity as a hero. He earned his status by destroying the planet-killing Death Star battle station that had threatened the rebels and the rest of the galaxy. While his torpedo shot down the Death Star's reactor shaft was “one in a million” as Han Solo called it, that action was the consequence of a more personal choice. In what is perhaps the pivotal moment in the entire *Star Wars* saga, Luke Skywalker, racing down the Death Star trench in his battered X-wing, pursued by Darth Vader in a TIE fighter, decides to do the unimaginable. To the shock of Princess Leia and the rebels, Luke turns off his starfighter's targeting computer. Rather than rely on the instruments of precision, he listens to that voice in his head—and follows his dreams. This is why *Star Wars* resonates beyond the cinema screen, across the globe. Luke's decision offers the purest and simplest of messages, a message of hope: believe in yourself and good will follow as a result. 🌟

IN CONVERSATION WITH...

MARK HAMILL, 1978

As Luke Skywalker returns to cinema screens in *The Last Jedi*, this interview goes all the way back to April 1978 when the Official *Star Wars* Fan Club newsletter met up with actor Mark Hamill, then 26, to discuss his casting as Luke and his friendships with rest of the cast.

Interview by Craig Miller

Did you like the character of Luke Skywalker?

Very much. Getting the part and making the film are memories I'll have forever.

I admire Luke's sense of loyalty and adventure. I mean, I'm on a farm and I want to see what's over the horizon. "What am I missing out on?" It's so brilliant of George Lucas, because I'm trying to figure a way out of that humdrum, void kind of lifestyle, and boom! I buy two robots and one of them has a hologram in him. It's a classic thing, and I'm thrilled at it.

Do you see yourself as Luke?

When I see the movie, I don't feel like it's really me. I see Luke Skywalker, and I'm embarrassed when he's naïve. Like when Han Solo says, "Who's going to fly this thing, kid, you?", and I say, "You bet I could!" I find myself going, "Oh, don't be such a nerd!" But reacting like that is right in character, I guess.

Do other people like him?

Sure. The kids are going in and seeing a fantastic film, and by fantastic, I mean unworldly. They see banthas. They see Jawas. They see Tusken Raiders. They see Darth Vader. There's just so much. And they see Luke. I think they feel comfortable with his character. He provides a nice balance, and fits in nicely with the others. I think



A New Hope publicity photo. Little did Mark Hamill know he'd be playing the part again 40 years later!

How did you get the part?

A friend of mine named Robert Englund told me about the auditions. I heard there was a picture George Lucas was doing called *The Star Wars*. Robert said he'd been out for it. I asked him what it was like, and he said, "I don't know, I haven't seen the script. George Lucas and Brian De Palma are doing auditions. George is the guy on the left who never talks." So I go, "OK, I'll go out for it."

I asked him if it was like *2001*. Robert said that he thought it was probably like *Flash Gordon*.

I went in on one interview, didn't see a script, didn't do anything. I just talked about myself. "Hi, I'm Mark Hamill. I have four sisters and two brothers. I grew up in Virginia, New York, and Japan." They said, "Thank you," and I went away. This was in November of 1975. In February of 1976, I tested. The way I found out about the test was an envelope arrived in the mail, and there

George Lucas has created an ensemble that works together well.

What do you think of your co-stars on the film, Harrison Ford and Carrie Fisher?

We're sort of like a family. Carrie is like my little sister, and I'm Harrison's little brother. Harrison is a serious actor, and a brilliant one. I'm surprised that he didn't get an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor.

were six pages of dialogue and a note saying to be there Tuesday to test.

I had totally ruled the part out. I had thought George was unimpressed, and I went out and tried out for *Apocalypse Now*. Fred Roos was the casting director, and he's very instinctive. I think he really helped me get the part. I think he pressured George to pick Carrie, Harrison and me. We were cast as an ensemble. There were two sets of three actors. We were never mixed and matched. 🙄

STAR WARS

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He's Worth A Lot To Me

Jeremy Bulloch: Inside Boba Fett

Boba Fett only racked up around six minutes of screen time in his first two cinematic *Star Wars* outings, but the character remains a fan favorite to this day. For Jeremy Bulloch, the first actor to play the bounty hunter on the big screen, those few minutes—or “five lines and a scream”—changed his life forever.

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT



bounty hunter Boba Fett may have made his public debut on September 24 1978, when

the character marched alongside Darth Vader in the San Anselmo Country Fair Parade, and first appeared on screen almost two months later—albeit in animated form—as part of TV *Star Wars Holiday Special*, but fans would have to wait until May 1980 to see Boba Fett on the big screen. Before securing the part, the actor charged with playing the armored mercenary was, himself, already a *Star Wars* fan.

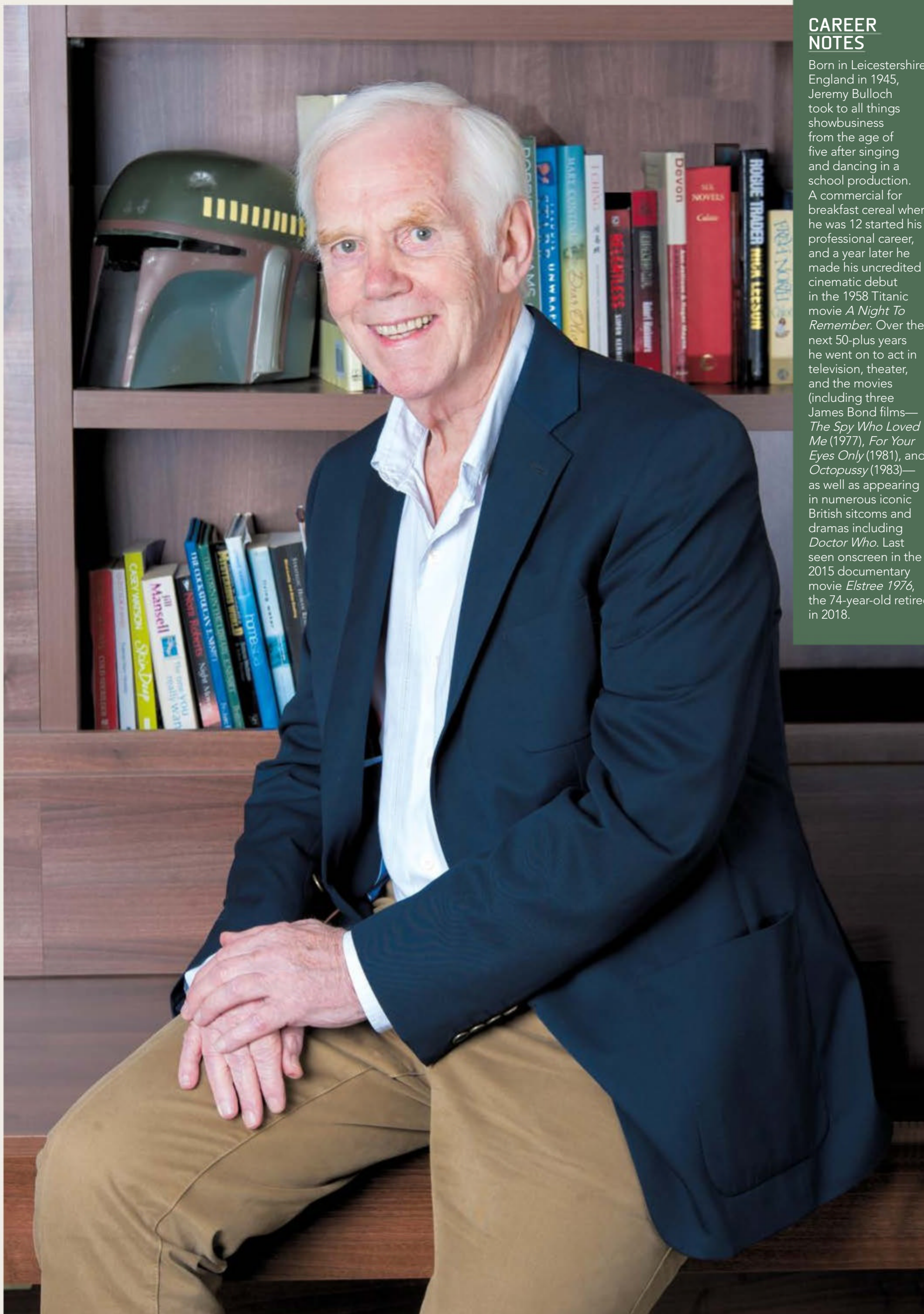
“I did see the original *Star Wars* movie with my two young sons, and thought it something quite amazing,” says Jeremy Bulloch. Little did he know that he would soon become part of one of the most celebrated film franchises of all time. “I was working in the theater in London when my half-brother, Robert Watts—the co-producer on *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)—rang me and suggested I get my agent onto Lucasfilm as there was a small part of a bounty hunter that was being cast,” Bulloch recalls. “I explained it would be very difficult as I was working in the theater, but he suggested that I should, ‘Just give it a go.’”

Watts’ gentle persuasion paid off, and Bulloch made the journey to Elstree Studios in London. “I went along and was dressed in the outfit, which fitted perfectly—even the boots were the right size—and I landed the part!”

While the outfit may have been a perfect fit, Bulloch’s first encounter with the iconic armor wasn’t exactly the stuff that legendary cinematic memories are made of. When faced with his Fett ensemble, he recalls with laughter that his initial reaction was, “My goodness—how do I get into that?” Donning the costume required “the help of several dressers,” but the actor admits that when he finally got suited up, he was “astonished at how cool I looked.”

CAREER NOTES

Born in Leicestershire, England in 1945, Jeremy Bulloch took to all things showbusiness from the age of five after singing and dancing in a school production. A commercial for breakfast cereal when he was 12 started his professional career, and a year later he made his uncredited cinematic debut in the 1958 Titanic movie *A Night To Remember*. Over the next 50-plus years he went on to act in television, theater, and the movies (including three James Bond films—*The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), and *Octopussy* (1983)—as well as appearing in numerous iconic British sitcoms and dramas including *Doctor Who*. Last seen onscreen in the 2015 documentary movie *Elstree 1976*, the 74-year-old retired in 2018.



► With the small matter of Fett's accoutrements sorted, the time finally came for Bulloch to bring his character to life and he began filming his scenes for *The Empire Strikes Back*. "I remember the early mornings, arriving at Elstree Studios to get into the outfit, and the first time I walked onto the set as Boba Fett, everyone just stopped what they were doing to gaze at the costume," the actor recalls.

However cool the costume looked, it still presented several problems for the actor inside. "The helmet tended to steam up, which seriously affected my vision walking around the set," Bulloch says of wearing the suit in action. "And the backpack was very heavy. It became quite uncomfortable after wearing it for some time, but Boba never complained!" It was these issues with the practicality of the costume which led to one of his most famous on-screen bloopers. "I trod on Darth Vader's cape due to poor vision, and we both nearly fell on the floor. I think they edited that out," he chuckles at the memory.

The Men Behind The Mask

Despite the role being small, Bulloch wasn't the only person to play Boba

Fett during filming. "John Morton stepped in for me once because I was also appearing every night in the theater in London's West End, so therefore had to leave the studio in good time every afternoon," he explains. "That particular day they were running a bit late for the scene with Darth Vader, Boba, and Lando, so John filled in. Obviously, the stunt men stepped in for the more dangerous scenes."

Such was the popularity of the bounty hunter that he also appeared in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983), with Bulloch happy to wear the mask once more. Fondly recalling his time on the shoot, he reveals that it was the scenes in Jabba's palace that particularly stood out for him, "because of all the extraordinary characters that were there. I was thrilled to be called back for *Return of the Jedi*, but not so thrilled to end up in the Sarlacc Pit," he laughs.

Bulloch didn't return to reprise the role in the Special Edition of *Return of the Jedi*, with Don Bies instead taking on the mantle of Boba. Re-casting—and different voices for updates—isn't something that Bulloch lets bother him, though. "It didn't worry me at all. It was Jason Wingreen who voiced the Boba Fett character in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, after all" he says.

With various other actors having stepped into the armor, voiced the character, or played an earlier incarnation of the notorious bounty hunter over the years, there's now an extended Boba Fett family that Bulloch is very happy to be a part of. "I get thanks from Daniel Logan for portraying the character, which indirectly led to him playing Boba as a young boy," he says of Logan's role in *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002). "Temuera Morrison, likewise, considers that his character, Jango Fett, came about because of the popularity of Boba. On the rare occasions we have gotten together at conventions, we marvel at the fact that Boba Fett played such a small role in the films but became so iconic."

01



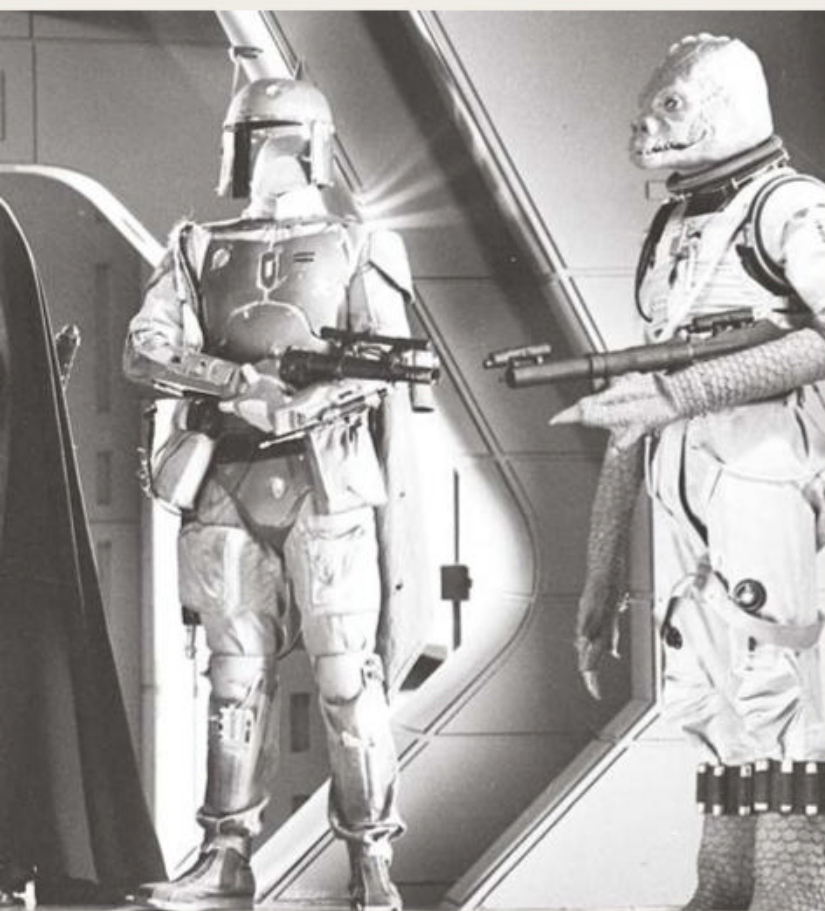
02



03



“The first time I walked onto the set as Boba Fett, everyone just stopped what they were doing to gaze at the costume.”



01 Bulloch also played Imperial officer Lt. Sheckil in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

02 Boba Fett's cinematic debut.

03 *Revenge of the Sith*'s Captain Colton (Jeremy Bulloch, second from left).

The Public Await

Despite the huge global appeal of *Star Wars*—and the world of fandom that we know and love today—it was to be quite some time before Bulloch returned to the franchise after his initial tenure as the bounty hunter ended. “After filming, my life went back to normal; appearing in television, films, and theater productions,” the actor says. “In the 1980s I was invited to two conventions—one in Florida and the other in Australia. After that, *Star Wars* was not really mentioned again until the re-release of the *Star Wars* trilogy.”

Things took a different turn when a familiar, slightly foreboding, figure from the past got in touch—and as we know, when Darth Vader calls, Boba Fett doesn't say no. “Dave Prowse gave me a call and asked if I would like to go to Pasadena for a convention,” Bulloch explains. “I replied that I was in the theater so it probably wouldn't be possible. I asked the producer, and surprisingly he was prepared to let me have the weekend off and put my understudy on stage, as long as I was back in time for the Monday night performance.”

With his time off arranged, Bulloch packed his bag and headed off for the bright lights of Los Angeles, but nothing could have prepared him for what was in store. “When we arrived in Pasadena there were lines of people around the block to see the *Star Wars* actors!” he exclaims, even now with a modicum of disbelief. For the actor, it was the beginning of a whole new adventure in the galaxy far, far away. “It all took off from there, and the interest hasn't really ever stopped,” he smiles. “I've traveled to many countries—too many to mention—and met some wonderful people. *Star Wars* fans are the same the world over.”

Back In Action

This was by no means the end of his *Star Wars* journey, however, thanks to an unexpected phone call that arrived in a foreign land. “I was on holiday in Italy when my mobile

“
I was thrilled to be called back for *Return of the Jedi*, but not so thrilled to end up in the Sarlacc Pit.”
”

phone rang,” Bulloch recalls. “My wife answered it and a voice said, ‘Hi, it's Rick McCallum here. Can I speak to Jeremy?’ We thought it was a joke, as not many people had my telephone number.” Yes, that would be the same Rick McCallum who produced the prequel trilogy, the actor confirms. “He asked if I would be interested in a small part in *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* (2005). I was quite astonished and of course said ‘Yes.’ It was strange going back as a different character, but it was nice to see some old faces from the original films.”

Playing Captain Colton wasn't the first time he'd appeared in *Star Wars* as someone other than Boba Fett though. “Because I was under a mask it took people quite a while to realize that I also played Lt. Sheckil in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and yes, I do get asked to sign the photo of me and Carrie Fisher,” the actor fondly reveals.

Although Bulloch didn't keep any physical mementos from his time on the various *Star Wars* sets, he retained many fond memories, which in 2004 made their way into his book, *Flying Solo: Tales of a Bounty Hunter*. The book sold out and quickly became a collectors' item, and although the actor has blogged extensively on his website since the publication's release, to this day, fans are still clamoring

“I’m really just an ordinary guy who got lucky wearing a very memorable suit.”

► for a re-release or new volume. “I have thought about an update to the book,” he reveals, “but it would mainly just be about conventions, which have since taken up a great part of my life.” However, despite his reluctance to publish further memoirs, fans remain eager for any *Star Wars* insights the actor can share. “Over the years fans have asked many, many questions,” he says with a smile. “And if I cannot answer them, I just say, ‘That’s classified information.’”

Bulloch is happy to offer convention advice for those newer additions to the *Star Wars* legacy. “I would suggest that they do not appear at too many conventions when they are still young, as they can take over your life,” he offers with a smile. “They should carry on with their acting careers. Enjoy every moment, and be very grateful to be part of the *Star Wars* family.”



04

A Final Bounty

While Bulloch himself is still very much part of that extended family, he decided to call time on his convention appearances in 2018. “After 20 plus years of traveling around the world I thought it was time to retire, and flying is not so much fun these days,” he explains.

However, while the actor may have drawn a line under his public appearances, the character he so memorably brought to life is as in demand as ever, and remains one of the most collectable when it comes to *Star Wars* merchandise. A sealed action figure of Fett made £26,040 (\$34,626) in a 2016 auction, and a prototype of the rare rocket-firing version reached £18,000 (\$23,933) the year before. But of all the pieces he’s seen, there’s one that stands out the most for the actor. “I think my favorite piece of Boba Fett merchandise is the Randy Bowen bronze statue,” he says of the Dark Horse Comics release from 1997. “It’s very rare and only 50 pieces were made. I’m also very fond of Boba Fett artwork, both by professional artists and fans alike.”

Along with Fett merchandise, there’s a whole troop of fan groups

supporting the character, with forums dedicated to cosplaying as Boba hosting hundreds of thousands of messages. Bulloch fondly recalls how it was one such group that helped him stage his final appearance (to date) as the famous bounty hunter.

“The last time I put on the costume—the one that was custom made for me by members of The Dented Helmet fan troop—was July 2018, when I appeared at a big event in London,” he shares. “At those shows I used to put on the outfit with the help of a couple of friends, and pose with fans for photo shoots. All the money I raised was given to Great Ormond Street Hospital, which is a brilliant children’s hospital here in London. It was quite moving to know that it was probably the last time I would dress up as Boba—but you never know...”

Ever humble, the fan favorite replies with his usual grace when asked to sum up his stand-out memory from a life associated with *Star Wars*. “Being told I’m an ‘icon and a legend’ in my own lifetime,” he says. “I’m really just an ordinary guy who got lucky wearing a very memorable suit.” 🙏

04 Jeremy Bulloch.

05 Bulloch as Boba Fett in *Return of the Jedi*.

05

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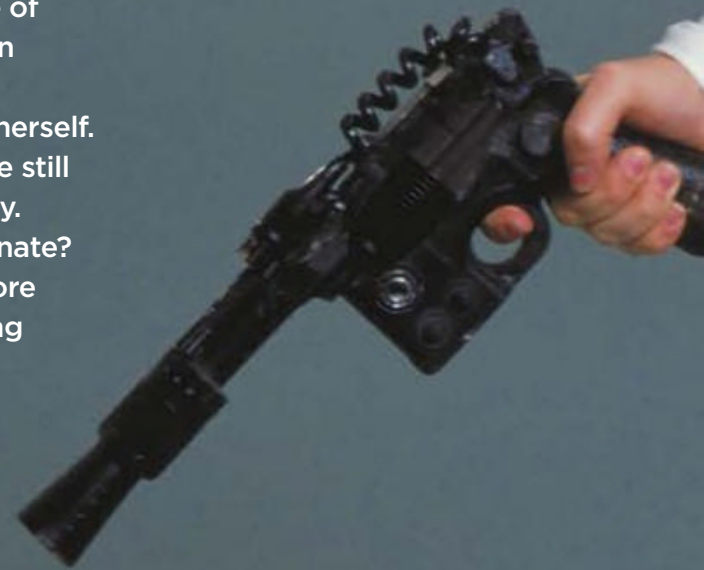
Insider looks back on the character Carrie Fisher made her own, and picks 10 immortal Leia moments that will live forever in the hearts of fans.

WORDS: TRICIA BARR

Selecting 10 memorable moments for a character should be an easy task. But consider the legacy of Leia Organa in the *Star Wars* universe and beyond it, and you realize it is no such thing. Leia is heroic and flawed, like any good character should be, and so was Carrie Fisher, the actor who portrayed her.

Fisher was candid about her own life, and made us laugh, even when she was hurting on the inside. She was aware of how important her character was to fans facing their own struggles, especially when they involved mental illness, substance abuse, or bigotry—all battles that she fought herself.

Little girls aspired to be Leia in 1977, and little girls are still putting on the white robes and signature buns to this day. But what are the moments that make her character resonate? Is it the princess planting a kiss on the dashing hero before they swing across a chasm? The adopted daughter seeing her father's world destroyed? Or the mother asking her former partner to bring their child home? There are so many instances throughout the saga that fans could cite as their favorite instance of Leia gracing the screen. Here are a few that are special to me.





10

INTRODUCING A HERO

◆ Fearless. That is the main trait that comes to mind when we first meet Princess Leia in *A New Hope*. She is confident in the face of adversity, and has the steely composure of a warrior. As the movie continues, everything we see of her only reinforces our initial assessment. Indeed, over 40 years of the *Star Wars* franchise, nothing has made the character waver from those traits. We have seen her as a daughter, a lover, a friend, and a mother, but always as a woman who defies fear. When she reappears in *The Force Awakens*, she still radiates the confidence needed to lead the Resistance, and inspires it in others—now as a general.

From the start, all we learn about Leia Organa is garnered using “show not tell” techniques. A woman concealed by a hood hides something in a small droid. As the droid leaves, she peeks out from cover and draws back her hood to reveal herself. Immediately, we know she is hunted, she is beautiful, and she is brave. She is clearly a fighter, as she draws a weapon, but she is also a tactician, as she allows herself to be captured so that her droid can escape. It is a selfless, heroic moment. She is then taken to Darth Vader, but does not cower before his towering figure. Instead she asserts her rights, insisting that she is on a diplomatic mission. Everything we have seen so far suggests otherwise, and we can only admire her brazen attitude in the face of overwhelming odds. Though she seems to be doomed, we know this character will be one to watch.

09

SELF-RESCUING PRINCESS

◆ The escape from the Death Star detention block is one of *Star Wars'* most iconic scenes. From Han's awkward conversation with Imperials to Luke's breathless introduction as he bursts into Leia's cell, the rescuers seem to be in over their heads. But the prisoner remains calmly acerbic, with Leia coolly declaring Luke "a little short for a stormtrooper," and critiquing the lack of an escape plan even as she gratefully flees with her rescuers.

This is the first time that Leia, Luke, and Han are all together, and they quickly fall into their familiar roles. The rebel leader Leia takes charge, snatching Luke's blaster and firing across the hall to a spot right next to Han. Han shows his trademark incredulity as she explains: "Someone has to save our skins. Into the garbage chute, flyboy!" Luke is the only one not to question Leia's actions (even Chewie has his doubts), acting on youthful, reckless bravery, and perhaps already feeling a bond of trust with Leia.



08

YAVIN MEDAL CEREMONY

◆ Leia does many awesome things over the course of *A New Hope*, but in keeping with her selflessness, she doesn't give herself an award at the end of it. When she presents medals to Luke and Han, she does so as a princess and a symbol of something greater. She has responsibilities beyond those of other rebel fighters, and must stand apart from time to time. The pomp of her role provides

a sense of structure and tradition in a galaxy that the Empire would remake as new. In storytelling terms, her presence on the dais reminds us just how important she is to the Rebel Alliance, even after the destruction of her home planet, Alderaan.

Of course, in this moment we are not invited to remember Alderaan: it is a scene of triumph, and—in a way—the best tribute the atomized planet could have. Life finds a way, and the young, vivacious princess flirting with two handsome men represents the fun, romantic spirit that the Empire simply cannot quash, even with a superlaser. Leia has a new outfit and new hair, the assembled audience is huge, the medals are magnificent, and the music is rousing. It is a lavish, uplifting scene that makes the heart soar and imaginations run wild.

07

BRIEFING THE PILOTS ON HOTH

◆ Some Leia scenes gain greater significance with hindsight. The Hoth scenes in *The Empire Strikes Back* include some fun Leia moments that build on the romantic possibilities set up in *A New Hope*. Yet it is the briefing of the rebel pilots on the icy planet that invites reassessment after seeing *The Force Awakens*. Whereas, in *A New Hope*, Leia is the natural leader of a small group, and a proficient fighter, on Hoth she is already in her element as a military commander. The screenplay captures this accepted authority in a few lines:

LEIA: All troop carriers will assemble at the north entrance. The heavy transport ships will leave as soon as they're loaded. Only two fighter escorts per ship. The energy shield can only be opened for a short time, so you'll have to stay very close to your transports.

HOBBIE: Two fighters against a Star Destroyer?

LEIA: The ion cannon will fire several shots to make sure that any enemy ships will be out of your flight path. When you've gotten past the energy shield, proceed directly to the rendezvous point. Understood?

PILOTS: (in unison) Right. OK.

LEIA: Good luck.

She might still be known as 'Princess,' but to all intents and purposes, this is our first glimpse of 'General' Leia. She is an even more empowering figure than the one we meet in *A New Hope*, and in 1980, she helped to convince a generation of women that they had a place in the military and other high-status strategic roles. The scene remains inspirational today.





06

THE KISS

◆ If romance is your thing, *The Empire Strikes Back* delivers it in spades. Much of it is played for laughs, which lightens the dire situation on Hoth—such as when Han comes back for Leia to make sure she escapes from Echo Base. The snarky banter that follows sets up a woman who is trying to stay emotionally detached. Dedicated to thinking about others' safety, she finds herself faced with a man who thinks about hers—and is therefore forced to think about her own needs, too. The tension builds as Han chips away at the wall she erected after Alderaan was destroyed.

Even as the story builds toward the release of this tension, Leia is portrayed as capable. The script

says she has finished “welding the valves she has been working on” on the *Falcon* as Han steps in to the confined area to help her “reengage the system.”

In this moment, we can feel Leia resisting the temptation to give into the proximity and the attraction. It starts out with a return to the playful repartee. Han calls Leia “Your Worship” and she asks him to stop. She calls him a scoundrel, and he accepts the insult with delight. All the while Han is moving closer and Leia’s inner conflict becomes more obvious. Then Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford deliver on an ambitious moment in the screenplay:

HAN: You’re trembling.

LEIA: I’m not trembling.

Then with an irresistible combination of physical strength and emotional power, the space pirate begins to draw Leia toward him...very slowly.

HAN: You like me because I’m a scoundrel. There aren’t enough scoundrels in your life.

Leia is now very close to Han and as she speaks, her voice becomes an excited whisper, a tone completely in opposition to her words.

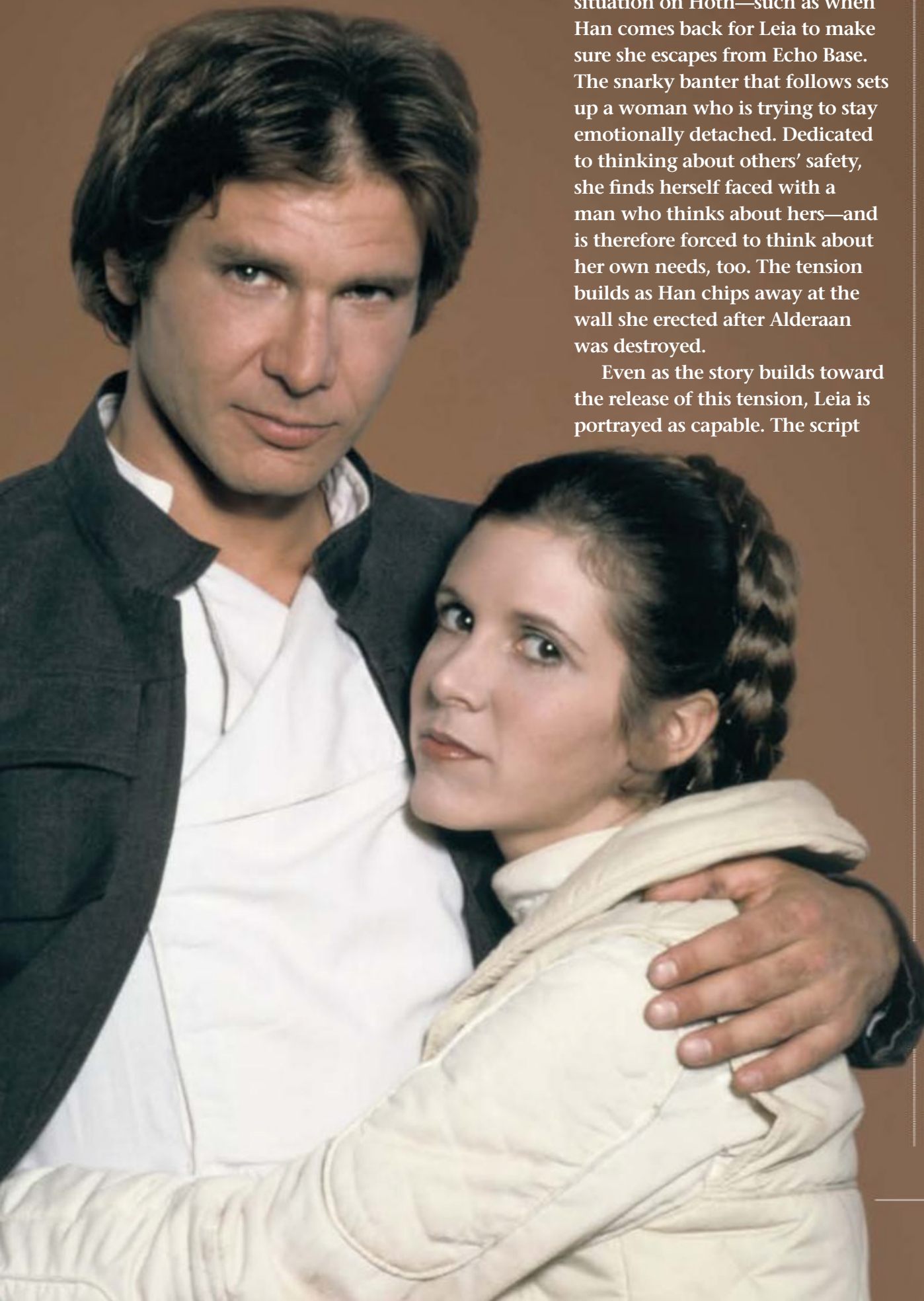
LEIA: I happen to like nice men.

HAN: I’m a nice man.

LEIA: No, you’re not. You’re...

He kisses her now, with slow, hot lips. He takes his time, as though he had forever, bending her body backward...

To see Leia give in to feelings of intimacy is rare and unexpected. It is a standard storytelling move for a male hero to convince a woman of his charms, but here the moment is more about Leia than it is about Han. This is owing to the skill with which the character has been written and performed up to this point, and it makes the kiss beautiful. Leia is enriched by her romance, rather than reduced to the side role of ‘love interest,’ and fans continue to find satisfaction and empowerment in how it plays out in this movie.





05

THE FORCE CALLS TO HER

◆ In 1980, the world sat stunned as Darth Vader revealed, “No. *I* am your father.” Yet while that one moment has become a shorthand for the entire Skywalker saga, *The Empire Strikes Back* contains another key moment for that crucial clan. Though it would not become a movie title for another 35 years, the idea that the Force could awaken within a character was seeded as Leia sensed Luke’s peril on Cloud City. Where Luke himself had trained to unlock his Force potential, Leia’s awakening is spontaneous and—tantalizingly—never fully explained.

As Luke hangs by his one hand from an antenna on the underside of Cloud City, still reeling from Vader’s revelation, he calls out to his

mentor, “Ben” Kenobi. We know from *A New Hope* that Ben can still reach out to Luke through the Force, but Luke does not get the spectral assistance he is presumably hoping for. Instead, it is Leia who senses her brother’s plight (though she doesn’t yet know they are related), and turns the *Falcon* around to go back and find him.

Does Ben nudge Luke’s own Force powers in Leia’s direction, or help Leia’s own sensitivity on its way? Do Luke and Leia unwittingly tune into a Force link they have always had without realizing it? Perhaps the best part of this scene is that we can all decide for ourselves and have lively, fun-filled debates about it.

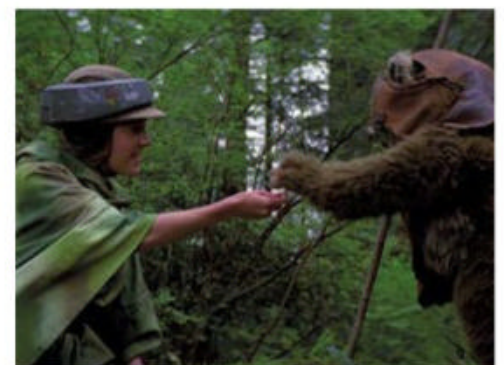
What is not up for debate, however, is that Leia takes control of the situation without pause. She does not stop to question her instincts or to weigh up the odds. Having just lost Han to the carbon-freeze chamber, she is not about to ignore a chance to save Luke, and the call to action is just the sliver of hope she needs. In that moment, the Force is perhaps her own salvation as much as it is Luke’s.

04

EWOK FIRST CONTACT

◆ After pursuing a personal quest to rescue Han in the first act of *Return of the Jedi*, Leia returns to the thick of the fight against the Empire. Before long, she is on Endor, piloting a speeder bike as part of a coordinated attack on the second Death Star: the latest iteration of the superweapon that destroyed her homeworld. For a presumed first-timer, Leia handles the bike like a boss—her latent Force abilities no doubt allowing her to keep up with Luke. But a scout trooper gets off a lucky shot, causing Leia to crash and pass out.

When she wakes up, Leia has a new companion: a small, bear-like creature that is eyeing her with caution and curiosity. Though the creature doesn’t look like a serious threat, Leia knows well enough not to judge by appearances, and affords it respect and space. This leads to a tentative alliance that proves surprisingly instrumental in the downfall of the Empire. On a straightforward level, it’s a heartwarming scene that makes good on Leia’s earliest claims to be a diplomat. On a broader scale, it’s indicative of how Leia’s sometimes snarky attitude is merely a shield for a deep humanity—something that proves as powerful against the Empire as Luke’s mercy for Darth Vader in their final reckoning.





03

BROTHER AND SISTER

◆ *Return of the Jedi* is undoubtedly memorable for its big set pieces and special effects, but its story works because of the intimate character moments. Perhaps the only thing harder than finding out you are the child of the galaxy's most fearsome bad guy is admitting that you are the child of the galaxy's most fearsome bad guy. Even for

a diplomat, Leia has a hard time disguising her horror when Luke reveals his lineage to her. But then he also tells her that she is his sister, and therefore Vader's daughter, too! Leia accepts this news with a simple: "I know. Somehow, I've always known," but still the truth clearly shocks her. When Luke leaves and Han enters, she has no words to explain to him what she has learned, but takes comfort in his presence nonetheless. At first, Han is angry that Leia and Luke are keeping secrets from him, but this swiftly passes. As Leia trusts Luke to face their father despite the risks, so Han has learned to support Leia's choices, and to stand by her regardless. As the core of a rebellion built on trust, they are all part of a family, whether or not they are bonded by blood.

02

REUNION WITH HAN SOLO

◆ With a new generation of heroes on the front line in *The Force Awakens*, Leia's screen time is markedly reduced. Her presence, however, is felt throughout the film. For a start, it is Leia who has been instrumental in establishing the New Republic that has brought relative peace to the galaxy. Again, it is General Leia who has spearheaded the Resistance against the First Order when the New Republic has proved too peaceful for its own good. Rey is inspired by the Resistance long before she meets Leia, and is no doubt representative of many others across the galaxy who believe in the same things (even if they lack Rey's innate abilities).

But for all that Leia is a figurehead in *The Force Awakens*, she is also allowed her intimate moments. She has suffered



many deeply personal losses—her brother, her son, her husband—and yet she fights on with quiet resilience. When she is reunited with Han, her composure almost falters, but she holds it together and they exchange a few words—an awkward echo of their one-time back and forth. It's a stark reminder that heroes stay human, and that their stories don't finish when their epic quests are complete.

To reintroduce Leia in such a very different place from where cinemagoers left her in *Return of the Jedi* is daring and far from an easy

option in story terms. But it has still more significance for audiences who know the battles Carrie Fisher fought in her own personal life. For Leia to have had an easy time over the past 30 years would have shattered the symbiosis that existed with actor and character, and done a disservice to Fisher's own life story.

As a result of these choices, and Fisher's subtle, sensitive performance, Leia's return to the screen is a triumph, and as her body language lets us know that she still loves Han, we can't help but be reminded that we still love Leia.



01

LEIA HUGS REY

◆ Not long after she asks Han to bring back their son, she realizes she has lost him forever. As she senses his death through her connection to the Force, she is left in the darkest place she has been since the destruction of Alderaan, all those years ago. Leia hasn't simply lost a husband; the fact he is slain by Kylo Ren means she is losing her son all over again. When the *Millennium Falcon* returns to the

Resistance base, Leia locks eyes with Rey, who witnessed Han's death and Kylo Ren's rage on Starkiller Base. Heavy with her loss, Leia holds Rey, and the pair seem to support each other. But this is not the act of a widow seeking solace; it is the work of a tireless empath, giving comfort to relieve another's pain.

Decades earlier, Leia embraced her new friend Luke as he mourned the loss of his mentor, Ben Kenobi. Now Luke is missing, and a new young friend needs her help to come to terms with the loss of her own mentor—Han. It is a moment of beautiful symmetry, but also of circularity, as it is Rey who will finally track down Luke, and seek to cast him in the role of mentor, too. Luke is the start and end point of the circle, but Leia is the thread that gives it shape.



GENERAL SLAYER

Carrie Fisher could slay anyone with her wit, and she brought that sharp tongue to her portrayal of Princess Leia as well. Here are just some of Leia's best and funniest lines.

"Governor Tarkin, I should have expected to find you holding Vader's leash. I recognized your foul stench when I was brought on board." (*A New Hope*)

"Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?" (On first meeting the disguised Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope*)

"You came in that thing? You're braver than I thought." (On first seeing the *Millennium Falcon* in *A New Hope*)

"Will somebody get this big walking carpet out of my way?" (On Chewbacca in *A New Hope*)

"Why you stuck up, half-witted, scruffy-looking, nerf-herder!" (To Han after he brags about her to Luke and Chewie in *The Empire Strikes Back*)

"I don't know where you get your delusions, laser brain." (To Han in *The Empire Strikes Back*)

"Would it help if I got out and pushed?" (To Han when the *Millennium Falcon* stalls on Hoth in *The Empire Strikes Back*)

"You have your moments. Not many of them, but you do have them." (To Han, with a peck on the cheek, after he hides the *Falcon* amid an Imperial Star Destroyer's trash release in *The Empire Strikes Back*)

"Oh, it's not like that at all. He's my brother." (To Han when he asks if she loves Luke in *Return of the Jedi*)

"When did that ever help? And don't say the Death Star." (To Han, when he says he is trying to be helpful in *The Force Awakens*)

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Extras playing stormtroopers rest between takes during the early morning location shoot for *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, at London's Canary Wharf tube station. Photo: John Wilson



“Evacuate? In Our Moment of Triumph?”

From Scarif To Yavin: The Psychology Of War

There is an old saying that winning a battle does not mean you have won the war. *Star Wars Insider* explores how the engagements seen in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* impacted upon both sides in the climactic Battle of Yavin.

WORDS: JAY STOBIE



G

rand Moff Tarkin's ill-fated decision to remain on the Death Star in *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) comes across

as foolish in retrospect, but the arrogance he displays as the superweapon prepares to eradicate the Rebellion's headquarters on Yavin 4 draws upon its impressive performances at Jedha and Scarif, as seen in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016). Victorious in their pursuit of the Death Star plans, the Alliance's hierarchy and fleet of starships nevertheless suffered excruciating losses at Scarif, which directly influence their defense of Yavin. The events leading up to Tarkin's notorious words created psychological ramifications for the individuals on both sides of the conflict, fostering false confidence among the Imperials and a last-ditch reliance on hope for the rebels.

To fully appreciate the connections between the Battles of Scarif and Yavin, we need to understand the manner in which the participants perceive those encounters. Prior to Scarif, rumors of an Imperial planet-killer worry the Alliance enough for them to dispatch Cassian Andor, Jyn Erso, and K-2SO in search of Saw Gerrera. This team bear witness to the annihilation of Jedha City and the chaotic dispersal of Saw's independent rebel faction. As Director Orson Krennic later points out to Galen Erso, the Holy City's erasure eliminates the last reminder of the Jedi who protected the Old Republic. Krennic's creation demonstrates enough power to rattle the most steadfast of veterans—as even General Draven appears speechless upon receiving Andor's report.

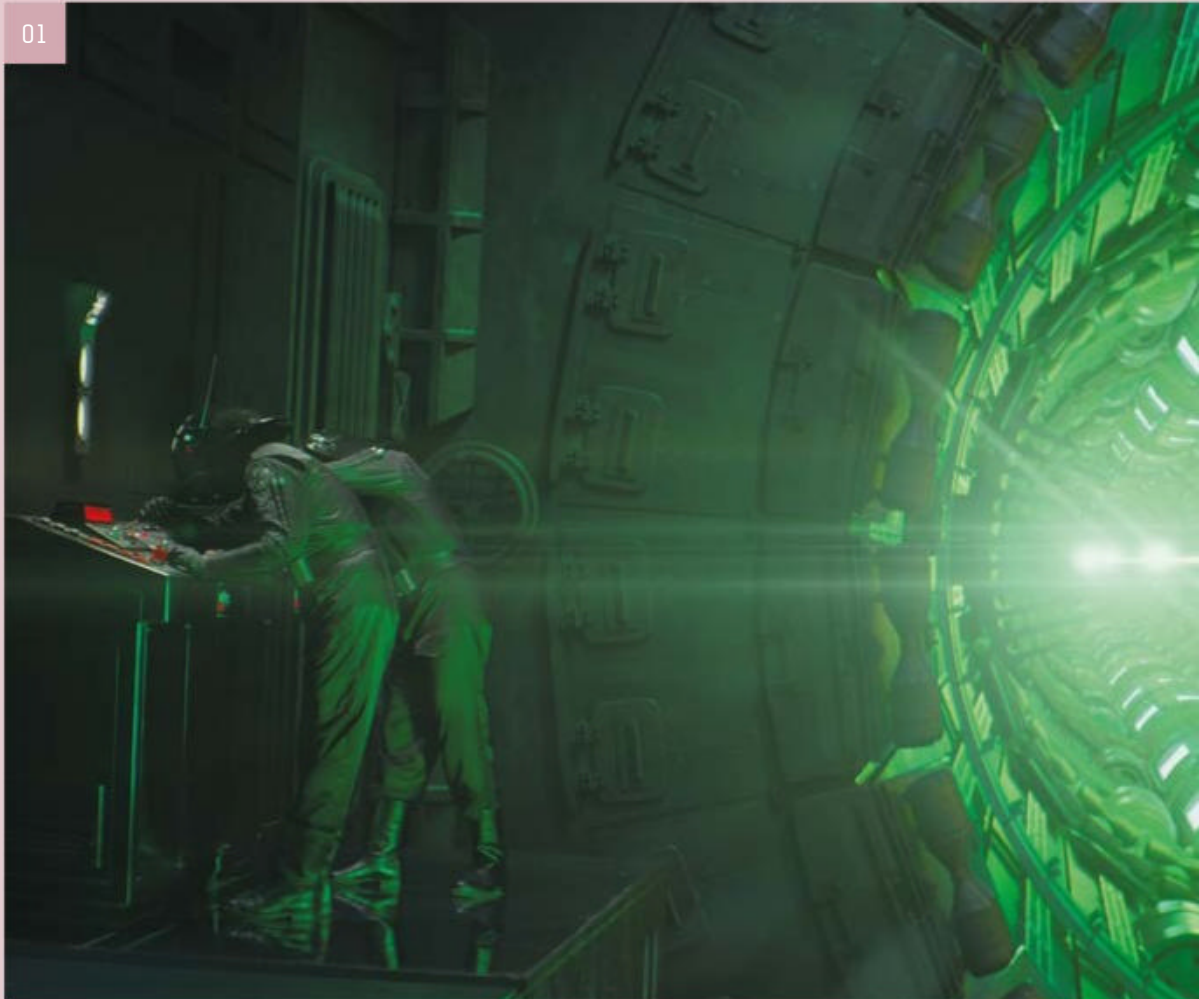
The strike evokes such fear that—after hearing about Galen's subterfuge from Jyn—much of the Alliance's top brass panic at the thought of assaulting Scarif to attain the Death Star schematics. Many doubt the credibility of the information, as well as that of Jyn, her father, and the former Imperial pilot Bodhi Rook. Those opposed to open warfare suggest that such an effort would waste the ships and other resources that have taken such a long time to muster, while others raise the possibility of surrender. Terror grips some rebels so strongly that giving up strikes them as the best alternative in the face of certain slaughter. ►

- Others, of course, believe that forfeiting the cause is unthinkable when even the slimmest chance of success still persists. And, in time, those such as Admiral Raddus are proved correct, when the Rogue One cadre infiltrates the security complex at Scarif, generating support to send in reinforcements. The transmission of the Death Star's layout to the massive flagship *Profundity* allows the Alliance to claim a win, albeit at a massive cost. Raddus and General Merrick are both killed, depriving the fleet of its primary commanders, and the Rogue One ground team perishes in its entirety. Numerous X-wings, Y-wings, and U-wings were lost during the hostilities at Eadu and Scarif, and the arrival of Darth Vader's Star Destroyer *Devastator* leads to the capture of the *Profundity*. To top it all off, many rebels witness the arrival of the Death Star at Scarif and its devastating deployment, sending vast shockwaves through the fleet's morale as well as across the planet's archipelagos.

The relatively small and tight-knit Alliance to Restore the Republic committed the bulk of its detachments to the engagement at Scarif, making it impossible to hide the extent of the losses from its surviving members in the aftermath. While landing on the beach at Scarif, one soldier cries out, "For Jedha," signaling how quickly awareness of attacks and engagements spreads throughout the ranks—the heavy losses at Scarif would most likely have been perceived by the average rebel in an even more desperate light. The entire Alliance fleet barely holds its own against two Star Destroyers and the shield gate's defenses, and it is only the sacrifice of a valuable Hammerhead corvette that staves off total defeat. No one even tries to go up against the technological terror that has twice now proven its unprecedented power.

In the wake of Scarif, the Alliance is denied the morale boost of rallying around the heroes who swung the battle in its favor. As well as losing the Rogue One team, Raddus, and Merrick in battle, Princess Leia and the *Tantive IV* are captured in the aftermath. The Death Star plans upon which the entire assault had been predicated are presumed lost, and the momentary victory seems forfeit. In the light of this, the psychological toll of losing so many friends and leaders at Scarif must cut even deeper for each and every rebel. The word "hope" serves as a rallying cry throughout Rogue One: for a conflicted Jyn Erso, a composed Leia Organa, and a war-weary Cassian Andor. While these individuals surely maintain a desire to vanquish their enemy, the sentiment acts as a mask for an underlying desperation brought upon by combating staggering odds for so long.

01

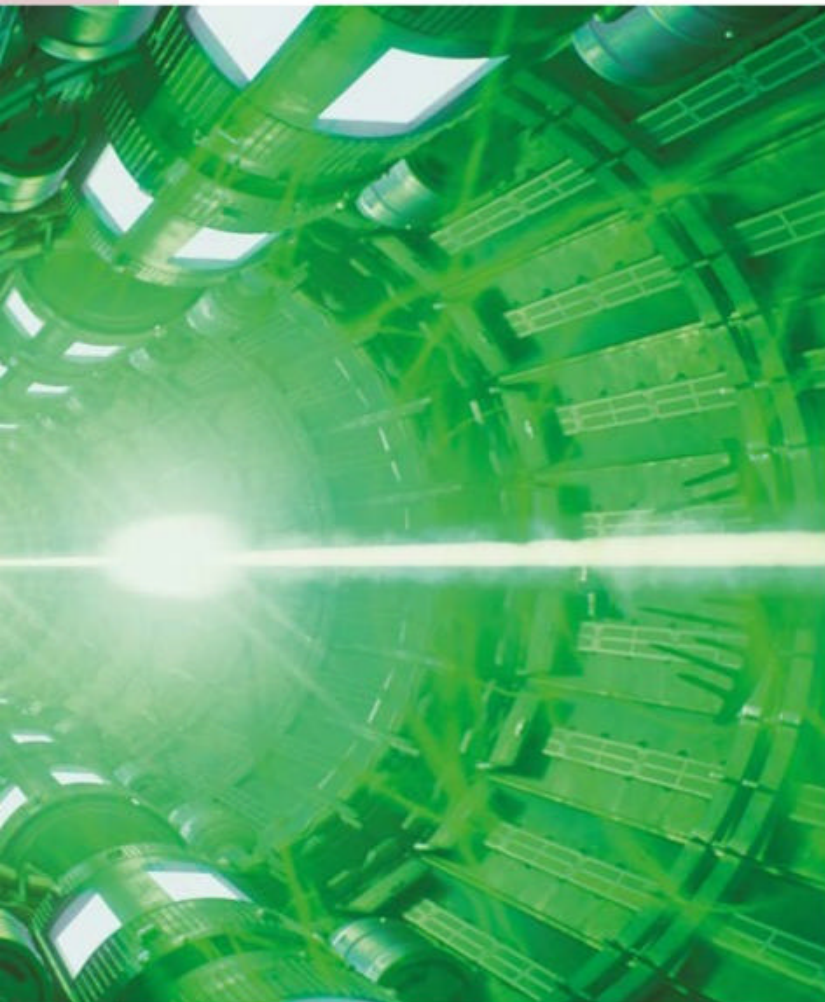


02



03





04

01 The Death Star's superlaser fires for the first time.

02 The rebels throw everything into their attack on Scarif.

03 Numerous rebel ships were lost at Eadu and Scarif, leaving the main base relatively undefended.

04 Tarkin's confidence is bolstered by the proven destructive power of the Death Star at both Jedha and Scarif.

Empire State of Mind

From the point-of-view of Grand Moff Tarkin and the Imperial elite, these events are the foundations of a very different outlook. The Death Star, plagued by setbacks for years, finally reaches operational status and demolishes Jedha City with a mere fraction of its potential. Two Star Destroyers, representing a minute percentage of the Empire's vast armada, prove capable of holding the entirety of the Alliance's forces at bay for an extended period of time. Tarkin brushes off the idea of entering his prized possession into the clash, correctly surmising that Darth Vader's lone Star Destroyer easily matches the remaining Alliance starships. A single corvette manages to escape with the stolen plans, but Vader soon captures the vessel. The recovery of the data seems inevitable, and the Grand Moff doubts the Rebellion's wherewithal to find an exploitable defect. During a senior staff meeting, General Tagge expresses the sole concern over the remote possibility that such an oversight exists. Tarkin and his advisors remain oblivious to the fatal imperfection that Galen Erso has constructed

into their ultimate weapon, as Jyn Erso divulged that information only to the recently deceased Orson Krennic.

Both Tarkin and Vader become yet more emboldened as the pursuit of the stolen schematics continues. The Emperor dissolves the Imperial Senate, thus removing the last vestiges of the Old Republic's governmental structure and granting more prestige to high-ranking military officials such as Tarkin. His battle station performs admirably at Alderaan, boosting his confidence, and even Vader succumbs to the lure of egotism after vanquishing Obi-Wan Kenobi. Though hesitant, Tarkin gives Vader permission to let the *Millennium Falcon* escape with the Death Star plans in order to locate the rebel base. He acknowledges the gamble, yet sees the opportunity to wipe out the insurgents as outweighing the risks. As the Death Star nears its target, Vader proclaims with absolute certainty, "This will be a day long remembered. It has seen the end of Kenobi, and will soon see the end of the Rebellion."

The Imperials also reap the benefits of their strict command structure, as the upper echelons shield their subordinates from learning about the theft of the confidential plans. At his castle on Mustafar, Darth Vader speaks with Director Krennic and says that the Senate was told that a mining accident caused the tragedy at Jedha City. During Obi-Wan's mission to disable the tractor beam, the conversation between the

TO FULLY APPRECIATE THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE BATTLES OF SCARIF AND YAVIN, WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE MANNER IN WHICH THE PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVE THOSE ENCOUNTERS.

05 A dark symbol of Imperial might: the Death Star.

06 General Dodonna briefs rebel pilots for what seems like an impossible mission.

07 A T-65 X-wing fighter awaits its pilot.

08 The main rebel base on Yavin 4.

09 The fate of the galaxy rests on the young shoulders of Luke Skywalker.

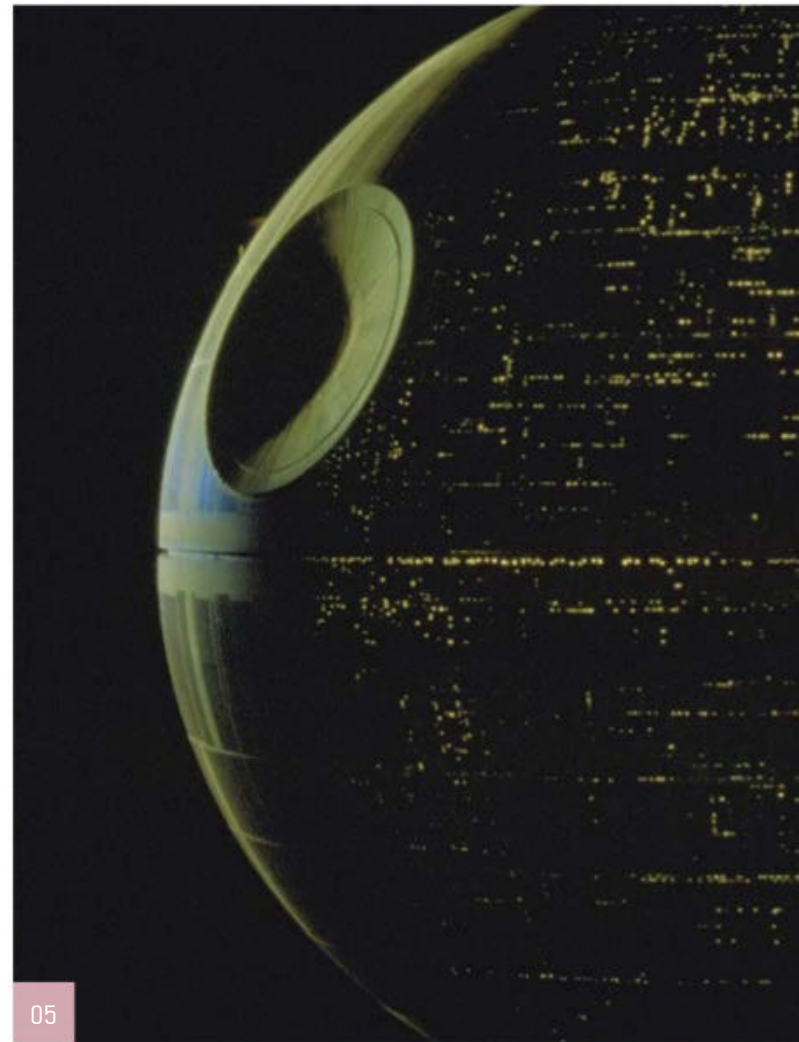
► stormtroopers nearby intimates that the guards never received a full briefing on the true nature of their current assignment and misunderstand the genuine alert as a simple drill. Such commonplace deception gives Tarkin and Vader control over the flow of information to their legions.

Never Tell Me the Odds

The turmoil preceding the Battle of Yavin clearly leaves different impressions on the two sides of the conflict. One simply needs to compare the establishing shots of the Yavin 4 base from *Rogue One* to those in *A New Hope* to see how it affects the rebels. After Scarif, the exterior is transformed from a landing field brimming with various classes of ships into a barren reminder of those no longer left alive to fight as the Death Star looms closer. After uncovering the hidden flaw in the superweapon's design, the question still remains whether or not the terminal shot can be accurately delivered. A self-assured Luke Skywalker offers reassuring words, but Han Solo's description of the plan as a suicide mission tempers the young man's enthusiasm. One wonders if anyone dampened Luke's spirits further by informing him about the fiery fate suffered by his "Red Five" predecessor at Scarif?

Despite all of the odds stacked against them, one group at least gives off an air of assertiveness.

THE DEATH STAR, PLAGUED BY SETBACKS FOR YEARS, FINALLY REACHES OPERATIONAL STATUS AND DEMOLISHES JEDHA CITY WITH A MERE FRACTION OF ITS POTENTIAL.



The prominent voices who survived the skirmish at Scarif, namely Princess Leia, Garven Dreis (Red Leader), and Dutch Vander (Gold Leader), project an air of professionalism and attempt to uplift the lower ranks. As viewers come to realize over the course of *A New Hope's* sequels, Leia's determination emerges from an inherent belief in her own aptitude. A glimpse of her poise surfaces briefly in the final scene of *Rogue One*, as she reassures the *Tantive IV* crew that the stolen data symbolizes the prospect of victory. Vander expresses doubts at the briefing before the Battle of Yavin, yet maintains a calm demeanor and a stable voice when he goes on to lead Gold Squadron through the trench. Dreis, meanwhile, offers encouragement to Luke and Biggs Darklighter as technicians fuel the snubfighters.

Devoted commanders and actionable intelligence aside, the reality of the Alliance's situation at Yavin is rooted in desperation. The rebels throw their entire fleet behind the assault on Scarif, only for it to cost them untold lives and critical resources. General Dodonna briefs the pilots before the Battle of Yavin and defines a strategy for triumph, but, in truth, these freedom fighters have only one method of attack available to them. Perhaps Dodonna and others present before *Rogue One's* departure recall Jyn Erso's prophetic words: "What chance do we have? The question is what choice?" No reserve units wait to follow the flight group dispatched from

MANY REBELS WITNESS THE ARRIVAL OF THE DEATH STAR AT SCARIF AND ITS DEVASTATING DEPLOYMENT, SENDING VAST SHOCKWAVES THROUGH THE FLEET'S MORALE.



07

Yavin 4. No powerful allies stand ready to take up the mantle of the Republic's restoration if a green-hued beam of energy happens to wipe out the Massassi temple cradling the last remnants of organized resistance. Those left to wait as reports come into the communications center release their unease and frustration via one outlet: hope.

Tarkin's Folly

No amount of strenuous training regimes and prior experience can ready the rebel pilots for their confrontation with a moon-sized opponent. As the ragtag fleet advances, Wedge Antilles gasps and says: "Look at the size of that thing!" Dreis immediately clamps down on the chatter, conscious of the demoralizing bulk of their competition. As the assailants press their offensive and incur casualties around the sprawling superstructure, the cool exteriors initially shown by the squadron leaders begin to erode. The deaths of Dreis and Vander leave the task of delivering proton torpedoes through the thermal exhaust port to the young trio of Luke, Biggs, and Wedge.

With the rebels in dire straits, Tarkin's hubris appears thoroughly warranted. No escort of Star Destroyers accompanies the Death Star on its mission to Yavin, despite the availability of the *Devastator* and *Executrix*, the respective flagships of Vader and the Grand Moff. Excluding the *Executrix*, at least eight other Star Destroyers



08



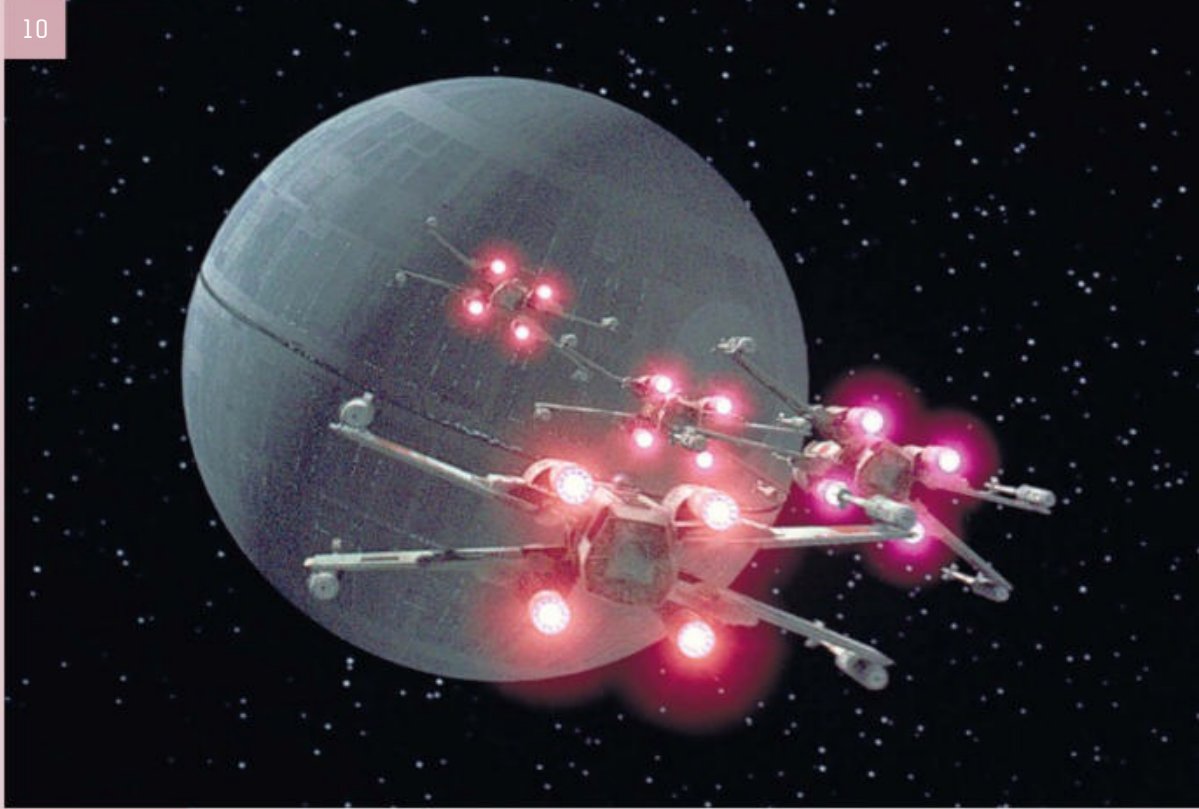
09

► oversaw the installation of the superlaser and protected the assembly area. But now the Death Star has proven itself, there is no need for additional firepower. Similarly, no TIE fighters launch from its bays to intercept the Alliance ships before they can get close to the battle station. When a number of TIEs do finally enter the fray, they represent only a fraction of the vessels berthed on the Death Star. And yet, with Vader's assistance, they swiftly reduce the number of rebel ships to just a handful. All indications point toward glory for the Galactic Empire, until...

An officer approaches Tarkin and says: "We've analyzed their attack, sir, and there is a danger. Should I have your ship standing by?" Tarkin's infamous and incredulous reply, "Evacuate? In our moment of triumph? I think you overestimate their chances," reveals that the thermal exhaust port is not the only flaw aboard the Death Star. Forged out of the embers of Imperial pomposity, an underestimation of the Alliance's desperate fortitude, and an unassailable attitude stoked by the shock-and-awe maneuvers employed at Jedha, Scarif, and Alderaan, Tarkin's misjudgment of the situation becomes his epitaph. Luke lets loose the volley of proton torpedoes that strikes the reactor and causes the superweapon's million-to-one detonation. Fittingly, Skywalker finds his target by putting his trust in the unseen Force, a decision that embodies the Rebellion's signature mixture of desperation and conviction.

The Death Star's tactical superiority over the ragtag Alliance congregated at Yavin

10



11

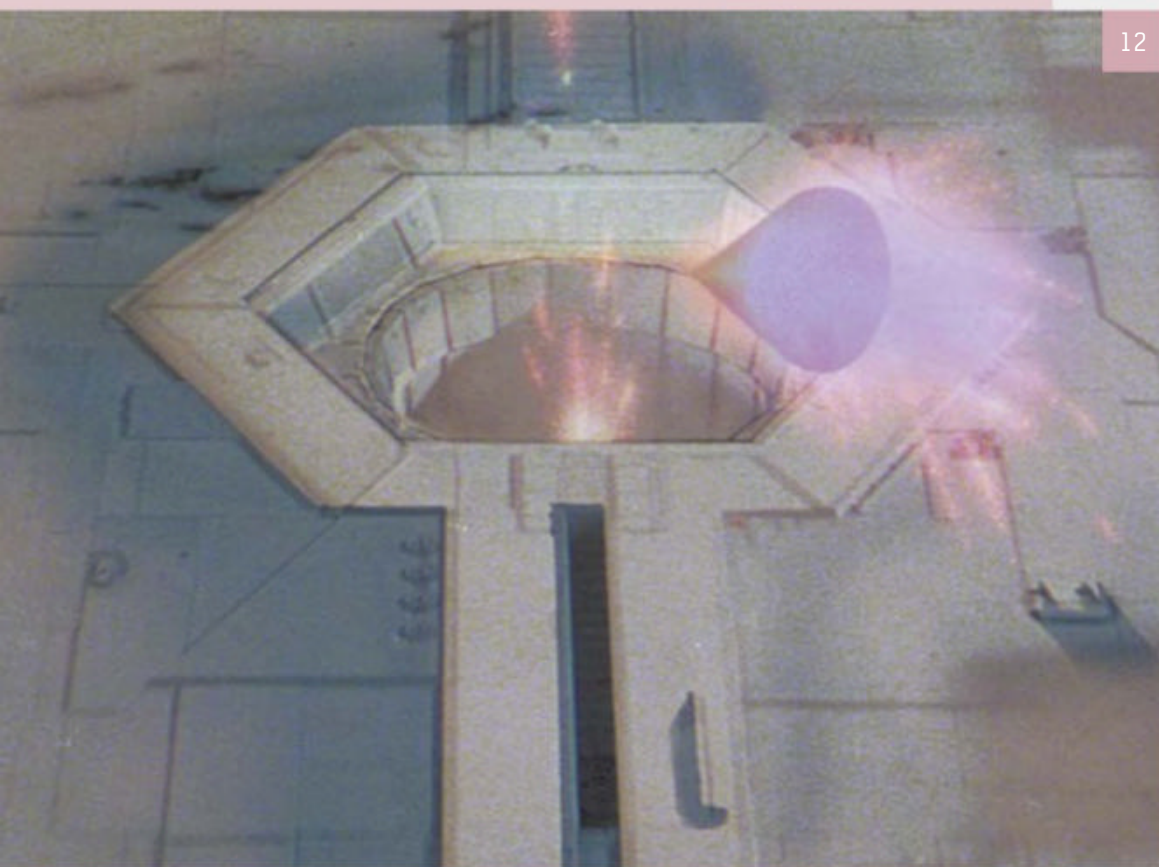


10 The desperate rebel attack commences.

11 Tarkin dismisses the danger posed by the tiny rebel fleet.

12 Luke's proton torpedoes exploit Galen Erso's secret design flaw.

12



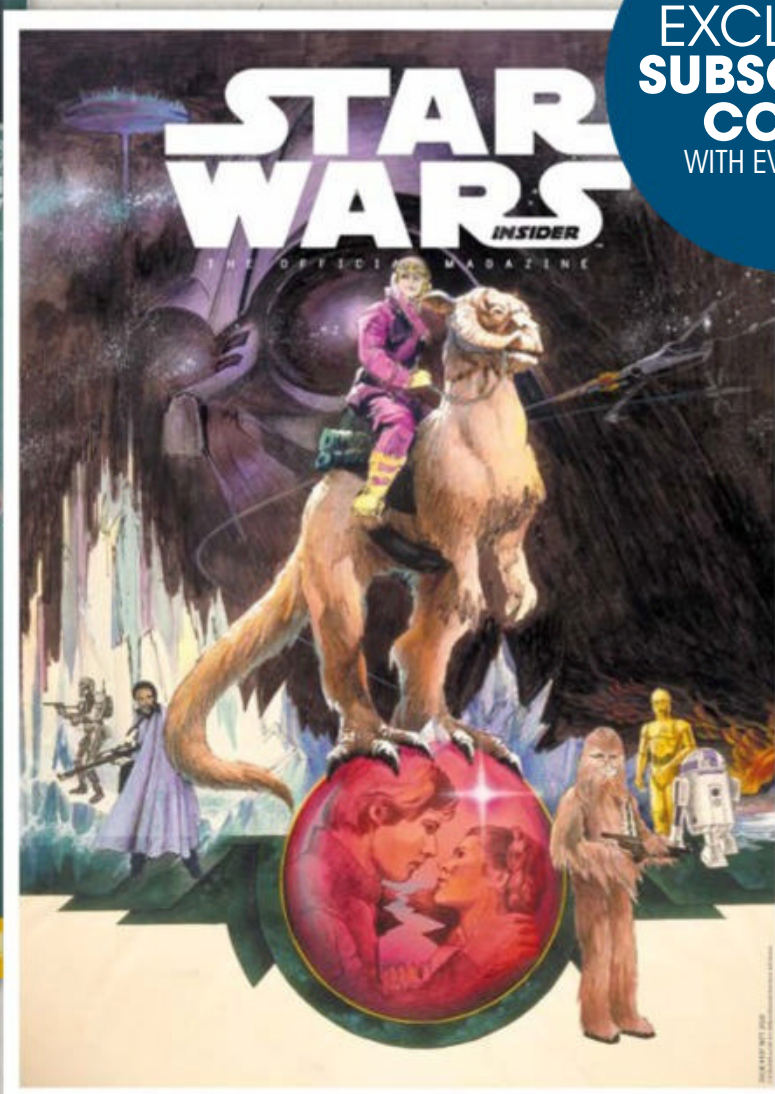
contributes to Tarkin's feeling of invincibility, but the psychological impact of him seeing the superlaser inflict such total destruction on Jedha, Scarif, and Alderaan surely buoys his false sense of security. Tarkin's true folly is not in believing in the invincibility of the Death Star, it's in his belief that the Force no longer has a place in the cold, rational galaxy he is building. Conversely, the events leading up to the Battle of Yavin leave the rebels feeling as if there is no refuge from the Empire's might, and incites them to risk everything rather than retreat. In a fortunate turn for the Alliance troops, this daring, do-or-die streak in their character perfectly exploits Tarkin's overconfidence. Though she does not live to know the truth of her words, Jyn Erso sums this up perfectly when she echoes Saw Gerrera's advice during the Scarif landing: "One fighter with a sharp stick and nothing left to lose can take the day. If we can make it to the ground, we'll take the next chance. And the next. On and on until we win, or the chances are spent." 🍷

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Menacing Merch

In celebration of the movie that launched the prequel trilogy, *Insider* picks out some of the more unusual and unique collectibles created around the release of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* in 1999. Forget about ace action figures and awesome toy replicas, this list is all about the weird and the wonderful.

WORDS: MARK NEWBOLD

T

wenty years ago, the world not only teetered on the brink of a new millennium but at the dawn of a fresh era for *Star Wars*. The 1990s had seen a resurgence in the

fortunes of the saga, with Timothy Zahn's *Star Wars: Heir to the Empire* (1991) novel topping bestsellers lists across the globe, and Dark Horse's *Star Wars: Dark Empire* (1991-1992) further priming the fans for the return of the now legendary film series to the silver screen.

In November 1998, the release of a trailer for *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* gave fans the first glimpse of what was coming. The reaction was unparalleled: fans were queuing up to buy cinema tickets just to see the trailer, and leaving before the first reel of the main feature. So, by the time theatrical launch day rolled around on May 19, 1999, fan anticipation was reaching overwhelming proportions.

In the months leading up to release (and, indeed, for many months after), anything with the words *Star Wars* printed on it was flying off the shelves, kick-starting an era of collectibles that rivalled the original Kenner action figures fever of the 1970s and 80s. Inevitably, it was a mixed offering: some were genuinely fantastic, and some were... well, let's just think of them as "memorable."

All have one thing in common: they captured the magical spirit of that final summer of the 20th century, when *Star Wars* once again ruled the galaxy both near and far, far away.

Full-Size Pepsi Figures

The return of *Star Wars* after 16 years saw new creatures joining the galactic menagerie, and Pepsi's marketing team was savvy enough to know how hungry we all were to see these new arrivals up close and at one-to-one scale.

Four characters sprang up in selected stores everywhere, namely Yoda, Watto, Jar Jar Binks, and the fearsome Darth Maul. Jar Jar and Maul both stood astride a wide plastic base, adorned with a gold-embossed film logo. Meanwhile, the diminutive Jedi Master stood atop a tall, silver footstool similar to his council chair, while Watto was perhaps the most inventive, secured high on a pole to show off his hovering skills.

Darth Maul is the most striking of the quartet, his double-bladed lightsaber gripped at the ready, while the detailing on Jar Jar gave fans a close-up look at the Gungan's aquatic design.



Gungan Sub Bath & Shower Foam

As one of the most eagerly awaited movies in cinema history arrived, there was only one way to keep control of the sweat caused by the excitement—bathing with the Gungan Sub Bath & Shower Foam.

Weird it may be, but this is also one of the best designed pieces of merchandise featured here. Contained within the simple model of a Gungan bongo sub, this 250ml bath and shower foam was so powerful it could repel sando aqua monsters at 50 meters.

The bongo wasn't the only *The Phantom Menace* bubble bath product to be released, and you could also choose to have a long soak in scary Darth Maul suds, or become the cleanest astromech in the galaxy with R2-D2 bubbles. *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002) would later add Jango Fett in an action pose, but the lack of a Jar Jar bubble bath in this range feels like an epic oversight—but at least we had our Swimming Jar Jar toy to keep us entertained. 🐸





Jar Jar Binks Pez Dispenser



The Phantom Menace may have introduced a multitude of dazzling characters into the *Star Wars* lexicon, but it's clear from the merchandise of the time that a certain itinerant Gungan was the primary star. Focus-group research clearly showed that Jar Jar was by far and away the most popular character with children, which made such items as Jar Jar Binks Pez Dispenser practically irresistible.

More than a simple head on a plastic rectangle, this electronically driven collectible shows a scene from Mos Espa: Jar Jar uses his freakishly prehensile tongue to nab a tab of Pez and hand it to you while market trader Gragra attempts to stop him with a butcher's knife. Subtle it is not but, as with many toys and collectibles from *The Phantom Menace* era, it has a goofy charm.

The collectible Pez range continues with the license today, having released a dispenser from every *Star Wars* movie and TV iteration. However, it's yet to release anything quite as unique as this confectionary Jar Jar experience.

Pepsi Droid Can Cooler Box (MTT)

Fans of the time will remember the staggering \$2 billion marketing deal between Pepsi and *Star Wars*, which covered the release of the original trilogy's special editions and *The Phantom Menace*.

That deal gave us a further glimpse into the world of the quirky, with the Pepsi Battle Droid Can Cooler box—a cool exclusive only available in Japan.

This very handsome piece was available in limited numbers, and quickly became a collectible chased by fans from around the world. The cooler itself features 10 Battle Droid Can Caps, while the front of the MTT opens to reveal a tray holding 10 drink cans.



The included battle droid heads could be placed on top of opened cans, with plastic straws poked through them to access your drink. The cooler even came with a water

bottle that could be put in the freezer to keep the cans chilled. With a convenient handle on top, owners were all set for a fun, Trade Federation-themed picnic.



KFC Swimming Jar Jar Binks

Remember when Jar Jar swims in the oceans and lakes of Naboo, on the way to Otoh Gunga and the subaquatic home of his people? That's what this gyrating Gungan toy celebrates. Another collectible resulting from the massive Pepsi deal was a swimming Jar Jar Binks toy, which was a promotional offer for those *Star Wars* snackers who were hungry for the Colonel's secret recipe. Made by one of the 1990s' most

prolific merchandise creators, Applause, it was certainly more fun to play with in the bath than a rubber ducky.

A backstroke swimming Jar Jar wasn't all you could find at KFC either. This was just one of many sets available from a variety of food chains, which included Joking Jar Jar, Lott Dodd and his walking throne, Anakin's pod racer, and Darth Maul's Sith Infiltrator and Sith Speeder.

Yves Saint Laurent Amidala Makeup

When you think of *Star Wars* makeup, you might automatically think of Stuart Freeborn—the makeup designer on the original trilogy who sculpted the Yoda puppet, among other great contributions to the saga. In recent years, however, *Star Wars* makeup has



gone retail, with contemporary brands such as Cover Girl, allowing those with a flair for fashion a chance to show their love for the saga. Back in 1999, such product releases were unheard of and, as such, this gorgeous range from Yves Saint Laurent was utterly unique.

Called One Love, the line marked a real departure for YSL.

Designer Terry de Gunzburg tweaked the outside of the packaging to match the deep red of Amidala's signature Naboo costume, and to complement Padme's different looks across the film, there were four themes: One Destiny matched her Naboo look when we first saw the queen on the Neimoidian screen; One Truth accompanied her ornate white lace outfit on Coruscant; One Dream matched her Naboo celebration outfit at the end of the film; and One Will complemented her outfit as she addressed the blockade of Naboo in the Senate.

ELECTRONICA

In the 1990s, a toy wasn't a toy if it didn't feature electronic lights and sound:

12-INCH TALKING ELECTRONIC C-3PO

Just like he is in the film, this character figure was chatty and conversational, delivering such lines as, "My parts are showing. Oh my goodness!"



THE ELECTRONIC DESTROYER DROID YO-YO

Released by Tiger Electronics, this was a serious piece of kit, loaded with droideka sound effects and flashing lights.

THINKWAY TOYS' INTERACTIVE TALKING BANKS

These piggy banks featured Obi-Wan Kenobi, Qui-Gon Jinn, and Darth Maul: they not only looked after your coins but could also be placed together to re-enact the fight scene from the movie's finale. Good, old-fashioned bank security.

THE ELECTRONIC HAND-HELD NABOO FIGHTER GAME

Gamers blaze through the Trade Federation's defenses and save Naboo across three exciting levels. It came with an exclusive Anakin Skywalker figure.



COMPUTER MOUSE

A PC mouse embossed with the likeness of Anakin Skywalker in his pod racing get-up. Compatible with Windows 3.1, Windows 95, and Windows 98, it was perfect for fans browsing the pre-millennium internet.

MAUL MANIA

Darth Maul was the iconic visual image of *The Phantom Menace*—but not all the merchandise based on the character was as scary as the villainous Sith.

MAUL MASK

The original Darth Maul mask from Rubies offered a unique take on the Sith Lord, but was highly unlikely to strike fear into anyone, let alone any Jedi Knights.



THE CANDY CAP DARTH MAUL BATTLE SABER

There were three different versions of this dispenser of small fruit-flavored candy tabs, but only this one had the power (and the taste) of the dark side.

THE MINNETONKA BRANDS BUBBLE BATHS

Another Darth Maul bubble bath joined the prequel frenzy in 1999, with his molded head atop a Maul-themed bottle. The line also featured model lids of Anakin Skywalker, Queen Amidala, and Jar Jar Binks.



Jar Jar Sticky Tongue Toy

You'd have to go a long way to find a weirder piece of *Star Wars* merchandise. This oddball promotional item was released for loyal munchers of Walkers crisps (aka potato chips) in the U.K., giving British fans the opportunity to own a disembodied Gungan head with a three-foot-long pink tongue. Not only that, but you could flick that tongue impressive distances to adhere itself to whatever you decided to target.

Walkers had been involved with *Star Wars* merchandise in the two-year run up to the film's release too, with a hugely collectible range of Tazos—distributed across many of the Walkers brands—celebrating the special edition releases of the original trilogy films. Similar to Pogs, these circular, hardwearing slim plastic discs featured images from the films on one side and were specifically created for swapping in the school yard.

Step forward to 1999 and the Jar Jar Sticky Tongue was being used to cheekily grab your friend's Tazos from across the classroom—depending on



how good your aim was, naturally. Lots of fun was to be had, from grabbing grandma's dentures while her back was turned to stealing the last cookie on the plate. Available via mail order and arriving in a multitude of colors, few pieces of *Star Wars* merch are as evocative of their subject matter as this.

Drink Toppers

Available at Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell and Pizza Hut, a range of 12 *Star Wars*-themed drinks toppers proved to be a great incentive, if one was needed, to collect representations of the movie's main characters while enjoying gallons of soda in the process.

The three fast food restaurants each had four figures: at Taco Bell, you could find Darth Maul, Anakin in his podracer gear, Watto, and Sebulba; KFC offered Amidala adorned in bright red, Boss Nass, Captain Tarpals, and R2-D2; while Pizza Hut had Yoda, Jar Jar Binks, Nute Gunray, and Mace Windu. The latter was notably the first Hasbro figure released for *The Phantom Menace* and so had already been immortalized in plastic, but to see the likes of Nass, Tarpals, and Gunray enjoy a moulded moment was worth their weight in vinyl.

Queen Amidala 12-inch Doll

In the modern era, where *Forces of Destiny* introduced large-sized action figures of *Star Wars*' female characters to toy fans worldwide, this inclusion of a series of Padmé Amidala dolls might seem old hat. But, back in 1999, when Hasbro first pitched this range to satisfy the desires of a young female demographic, the concept was relatively unique. This range of 12-inch dolls focused purely on Padmé and her many costume changes, and, much like today's *Forces of Destiny* figures, were lavishly presented in rich, red packaging.

There were two ranges to choose from. The Playline range featured the

rare Beautiful Braids Padmé, Hidden Majesty Queen Amidala, Queen Amidala Return To Naboo, and Royal Elegance Queen Amidala. The Portrait Edition line included Queen Amidala Black Travel Gown, Queen Amidala Red Senate Gown, *A New Hope* Celebration Gown Leia, and a two-pack featuring Qui-Gon, in the Qui-Gon Jinn & Queen Amidala: Defense Of Naboo set.

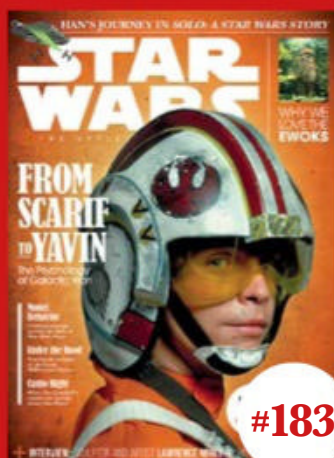
For collectors, this range proved to be too much of an oddity and the line was ultimately discontinued. But Hasbro's attempt to kick-start a female-focused collector's market was certainly unique for the time.



COMPLETE YOUR COLLECTION!



#182



#183



#184



#185



#186



#187



#188



#189



#190



#191



#192



#193



#194



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#197



FORCES OF DESTINY



After two hit runs on YouTube and the Disney Channel, *Star Wars: Forces of Destiny* joins stablemates *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* and *Star Wars Rebels* in the annals of animated history. *Insider* reflects on the success of the micro-series, and speaks to three of its stars: Shelby Young, Catherine Taber, and Vanessa Marshall.

C

apturing “the small moments and everyday decisions” that shape the lives of the *Star Wars*

characters we know and love, *Forces of Destiny* was described by Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy as “a fun new way for people to experience *Star Wars*.” In fact, the 31 bite-sized mini-adventures turned out to be far more than simple animated slices of fun, and the series reveled in essaying the personalities and attributes of its heroes in this condensed, three-minute format.

Each episode came with its own powerful message inspired by the bravery, heroism, and resolve of some of *Star Wars*’ most iconic characters, and more specifically (especially during the first season) on telling those stories from the

perspective of female characters. Among others, Leia Organa (Shelby Young), Padmé Amidala (Catherine Taber), and Hera Syndulla (Vanessa Marshall) each took a spot in the limelight, often filling intriguing narrative gaps or teaming up in previously unseen combinations during exciting new adventures.

Actors from across the movie and television incarnations of *Star Wars* reprised their original roles, with Lupita Nyong’o (as Maz Kanata) providing the first season’s opening monologue, and Daisy Ridley and Felicity Jones returning as Rey and Jyn Erso, respectively. Ashley Eckstein also came back as fan-favorite Ahsoka Tano, with Tiya Sircar’s Sabine Wren starring in several episodes.

The intention was to widen the appeal of the universe to a younger audience, and also be of interest to girls who may have considered

Star Wars to be just “a boys’ thing.” The series also served to highlight the positive female role models the series has produced since Carrie Fisher’s irrepressible princess stole her every scene in *Star Wars: A New Hope*—even in the form of a holographic mayday.

Star Wars has always broken ground in this regard, particularly in the television series created by Lucasfilm Animation, so it’s fitting that *Forces of Destiny* is the vehicle that presses this point home. There are also inspirational role models behind the scenes, with lead writers Nicole Dubuc and Jennifer Muro crafting the scripts and Carrie Beck as co-executive producer.

The proof of the series’ success will not only come through the new fans it brings to *Star Wars*, but by those young viewers it encourages to become storytellers and film makers themselves.



PRINCESS LEIA

S H E L B Y Y O U N G

Shelby Young has been acting for as long as she can remember. Now the self-confessed “Disney nerd” is living the dream as the voice actor behind Princess Leia on Disney Channel’s *Star Wars: Forces of Destiny* animated series.

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT

Star Wars Insider: How did you first get into acting?

Shelby Young: My mom put me into pageants when I was very young. Some of the judges were modeling and commercial agents, and even though my mom didn’t think I was old enough to pursue acting, she let me start doing commercials after a year of me begging! Even then I would always complain that I didn’t have enough dialogue. I was a little ham!

What was your first voice-over?

After moving to New York as a kid, I started doing a lot of voice work for the General Mills brand, including animated *Trix* yogurt and *Lucky Charms* cereal commercials. In my adolescent mind, I incorrectly viewed V/O as a side job, rather than a regular acting job, and once I moved out to California I took a long break from voice-over, which was the dumbest thing I could have done. When I ended up working on the video game *Dead Rising 3*, which involved motion-capture as well, I thought: *What have I been doing these past years? I love this!*

What is your first memory of *Star Wars*?

My stepbrother is a huge *Star Wars* fan, and he got my whole



FOREVER YOUNG

Having made her TV debut in an episode of *Going to California* in 2001, Florida-born Shelby Young is now best known for her recurring roles in *Everybody Hates Chris* (2005-2008), *Days of Our Lives* (2009-2011), and *American Horror Story* (2011). TV work has also included guest appearances in *Ghost Whisperer* (2006) and *Criminal Minds* (2012). Young has voiced characters in multiple video games including *Dead Rising 3*, *Battlefield 1*, and *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*, and has provided additional voices for animated movies such as *Smurfs: The Lost Village* (2017), and *The Boss Baby* (2017). She has also appeared in films *The Social Network* (2010), *The Midnight Game* (2013), and *Nightlight* (2015).

family into it. He’s a member of the 501st and dresses up in his own sandtrooper outfit for charity events. My earliest memories of *Star Wars* come through him, but I didn’t actually sit down and watch all the movies until I was doing *Dead Rising 3*. It’s funny, because someone on set there used to call me Princess Leia. He found out I hadn’t actually watched all the movies, and I said: “OK, if I watch at least one film, would you please just call me Shelby again?” So, I sat down to watch *Star Wars: A New Hope* and then binge-watched all of the movies.

The prequels too?

Oh yeah! Padmé is one of my favorite characters, so I’m a big prequels fan because of her. I’ve seen pretty much everything *Star Wars*-related, now. Once I saw *A New Hope*, I was hooked!

What’s your favorite element of *Star Wars*?

The fact that there’s this big galaxy filled with so many exciting and sometimes terrible things! And it’s told in such a realistic way— weirdly, for a film full of aliens and whatnot—that when you watch it, it makes you feel like you’re a part of that universe.

Having seen all the movies, did you have to do much research for the role of Princess Leia in *Forces of Destiny*?

I re-watched all of the movies at least three times. I was trying to really focus on and capture every single facet of Carrie Fisher's performance, specifically in *A New Hope*. I feel like I'm still learning whenever I re-watch them, and there's so much *Star Wars* lore and history that I'm always absorbing new things.

How did your role in *Forces of Destiny* come about?

It was a dream. I got an interview through my agent, and you could tell it was *Star Wars* just from the style of writing in the script pages, and, of course, that they were asking for a young-sounding Carrie Fisher! I did the best that I possibly could, but I didn't want to get my hopes up too high. I just wanted to focus on capturing Princess Leia's strengths. I didn't hear anything for two weeks, so I put it out of my head. When you're an actor, you can't sit and pine over one audition, because you won't be able to focus on the next one. But when they finally offered me the role, I cried! I was so excited. Of course, I wasn't allowed to tell anyone, but I did call my mom. She was excited for me, but she didn't fully get it until she saw *Forces of Destiny* when it came out. She said: "Oh wow, this is really big," and I'm like: "Yeah mom, why do you think I was freaking out so much?"

Did you audition with a new script or an iconic Leia scene?

It was similar to the episode "Bounty of Trouble" [Season One, Episode Eight], where Leia and Sabine are talking about the importance of a data tape, but it wasn't exactly the same. I think it was written specifically for the audition process.

Did you get any advice from *Star Wars* veterans?

I met [Padmé Amidala voice actor] Catherine Taber at an event, and

she gave me some good advice, mainly about recognizing what a big opportunity this is and not to read YouTube comments!

Dave [Filoni, the executive producer of *Forces of Destiny*] gave me some great advice on my first recording day, too. He told me to watch other films with strong female leads, find lines that I liked that show their strength, and then recite those lines as though Leia was saying them. As a way to get into that mindset, that was really, really helpful.

How do you approach a role that's so closely associated with another actor?

Carrie Fisher is Leia. She always will be Leia. So, not only is this one of the coolest jobs I've ever had, but I also feel so honored to be stepping in her footsteps. It's a lot of pressure, and I don't want to let any of the fans down, but it's also very interesting, because

01 Luke, Leia, and their Ewok allies face a huge new foe in "Traps and Tribulations."

it takes a lot of research, and a lot of watching and listening. I really want to stay true to Leia's voice, and on my way to sessions I listen to recordings of Carrie Fisher as Leia that I play and then repeat back. I'm just talking to myself in my car, so I probably look like a crazy person. Actually, that's probably pretty normal in L.A.

Had Carrie already passed away when you accepted the role?

No, she hadn't, and it was so hard for everyone when we heard the news. It's crazy, because I still feel like she's with us sometimes. I'll hear funny stories being passed around, and it just seems like she was the coolest woman. Even though I never met her, I've gotten close to her because I was doing so much research. Not only watching the films, but watching interviews and really trying to get a sense of who she was. And of course, I grew up knowing who she was. It hit really, really hard. It was very sad.

What's it like in the studio, recording *Forces of Destiny*?

It depends on who I'm acting alongside. On my most recent episode with Maz Kanata, Lupita Nyong'o wasn't in California, so I didn't get to meet her and that was me recording by myself in

"Carrie Fisher is Leia. She always will be Leia. So, not only is this one of the coolest jobs I've ever had, but I also feel so honored to be stepping in her footsteps."



“I think it’s really exciting that we now have this series that says: “*Star Wars* is for everyone, and here are some super-cool women doing some amazing, strong things.”





03

► the studio. However, I was able to record with Tiya [Sircar] who plays Sabine, and with A.J. LoCascio who voices the Young Han. I love recording either way, but when you have another person in there acting with you, there's this great back and forth that happens that can really add to a recording session. It's always really relaxed and the whole team is nicer than I ever imagined they could be.

How have you found the fans? Have you met many?

I haven't been to a convention yet, but I correspond a lot with fans on social media. The fan response so far has been really great, especially with regard to how we're tying all these events together. I think it's really cool that we get to show these bits and pieces that have never been seen on screen before, like how Leia got her bounty hunter armor, and the dress she wears in *Return of the Jedi*. One woman made me a *Forces of Destiny* dress, which is amazing. She made it from a *Forces of Destiny* bedsheet, and it's super comfortable. If I do ever go to a convention, I will definitely be wearing it!

Forces of Destiny definitely seems to have the spirit of the moment.

Yeah, it's so awesome. Growing up, one of the reasons I never really gave *Star Wars* much of a shot

02 Leia (Shelby Young) meets Maz Kanata (Lupita Nyong'o) in Season Two episode "Bounty Hunted."

03 *Star Wars Rebels*' Sabine Wren (Tiya Sircar) teams up with Leia in "Bounty of Trouble."

was because I thought it was just for boys. Even though there was Princess Leia and Padmé, it was just something that all the guys at my school liked. The girls didn't know that it was something that they'd enjoy, too! I think it's really exciting that we now have this series that says: "*Star Wars* is for everyone, and here are some super-cool women doing some amazing, strong things." That doesn't just have to mean strong physically, but strong emotionally, too. I think it's a really special show. It's not overly 'girly.' It just reads as *Star Wars*. That's why it's awesome for adult fans and young boys, just as much.

And, obviously, the dolls are great, too...

I love them! I have my Leia dolls on my bookshelf. As a young girl, I would have loved to have had them with my Barbies, and now, as an adult, I think they're such cool dolls—not just because I'm biased! I'm honestly so jealous of kids now. I wish I'd grown up with these dolls, and I wish I'd had *Forces of Destiny* and *Rebels* growing up too. It's a really cool time to be a *Star Wars* fan. There's so much new content coming out. I can't wait for Galaxy's Edge to open at Disneyland. I'm so pumped for that. I'm the biggest Disney nerd and I have an annual pass. I try to go at least once a



Destiny Calling

Shelby Young's appearances as Princess Leia:

SEASON ONE

"Ewok Escape"

Princess Leia and her friend Wicket help the Ewoks evade a group of stormtroopers.

"Beasts of Echo Base"

Chewbacca is in the clutches of a wampa, so Leia and R2-D2 hurry to his rescue.

"Bounty of Trouble"

Leia and Sabine Wren team up to evade an attack by droid bounty hunter IG-88.

"An Imperial Feast"

The princess sends Han Solo on a mission to barter for supplies with Hera Syndulla.

SEASON TWO:

"Bounty Hunted"

How Leia came into possession of bounty hunter Boushh's armor.

"Traps and Tribulations"

Leia and Luke discover why the Ewoks set so many traps!

month if my schedule allows it. I know all the hidden tricks and secret Mickeys that there are at Disneyland.

It must be a dream come true for you to be acting in *Star Wars* and it being on the Disney Channel?

Nothing could be better! I have a dream journal where it says: "One day I want to be a Disney princess on the Disney Channel," and from a certain point of view, Leia is now a Disney princess. So *Forces of Destiny* is absolutely the dream job for me.

PADMÉ AMIDALA

CATHERINE TABER

Known to *Star Wars* fans as the voice Padmé Amidala in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, a role which she reprises in *Star Wars: Forces of Destiny*, Catherine Taber tells *Insider* how *Star Wars* was her big break into the acting profession.

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT

Star Wars Insider: You're back playing Padmé again in the animated micro-series *Forces of Destiny*. How did you find the experience?

Catherine Taber: It's always lovely as an actor when you don't even audition and they just call and say: "We would like to have you be a part of this." It was really exciting and fun, getting to go in and see old friends in the cast and crew. Just a lovely experience all round.

What's funny about *Forces of Destiny* is that I auditioned for Leia! I had no idea what it was for, but I read for the part a couple of weeks before I got the call asking me to come back as Padmé. I worked my hardest to do my best Leia, but had I known what the project was and that Padmé was going to be in it, I might not have worked quite so hard on the audition! And I am thrilled Shelby got the role, she is awesome!

You're best known as the voice of Padmé Amidala in *The Clone Wars*, and you played Leia in *The Force Unleashed* video games and other projects. Is it very different taking on a role that has been established by another actor?

It is to some extent. Particularly with someone like Carrie Fisher. She's so iconic and unique that you



TABER TALES

One of Taber's earliest television appearances was in a 1998 episode of *Beverly Hills 90210*, and her voice can currently be heard as recurring villain Medusa in the *Avengers* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* animated series. Taber has also provided voices for a wide range of video games, including *Minecraft*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Final Fantasy*, *Resident Evil*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Disney Infinity* and *Marvel Superheroes*. She made her feature film debut alongside *Star Trek's* Wil Wheaton in *The Girls' Room* in 2000, and can be heard as the voice of a weapons technician in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015). Catherine runs a charity called Games for Soldiers, which collects and distributes video games to U.S. soldiers posted overseas.

really want to do justice to what Carrie did. There's just something about Princess Leia and Carrie Fisher that goes together, and you cannot separate the two.

With Leia, there is definitely a lot more trying to make sure you're staying true to that character as Carrie portrayed her. When I played Leia in *The Force Unleashed* games, I'm playing her at a different age. I'm playing her much younger, which I felt really comfortable with. You know you're never going to be quite as good as Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia, so why even act like you are going to? But she's so iconic that you have a real blueprint. You say: "OK, here is what she did. Let me try to do somewhat of a copy of that and hopefully do it justice." Basically, I just try not to screw it up too much!

In many cases, acting is all about that. If you're playing Ophelia in *Hamlet*, then many, many actresses have portrayed Ophelia before you, and you don't try to do what some other actress did before. So you try to honor both the playwright and the character.

I felt like I did that a little bit more with Padmé, and by the time we'd finished *The Clone Wars*, we'd all said more words as those characters that anyone in the films had done. I really felt like I knew

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and understood Padmé. Dave Filoni [supervising director on *The Clone Wars*] was great about saying: “This is *your* Padmé; you’re playing the role now.” So, I really felt like I got to make it my own.

With its strong female-focus, *Forces of Destiny* feels like it could’ve existed 20 years ago. The idea that girls can play with *Star Wars* toys too isn’t anything new...

True, but I feel like *Star Wars* has always been ahead of the curve when it comes to that. Princess Leia was always in there with the boys, and there wasn’t this gender power struggle that you see in so many other franchises. She was able to be a princess, but also be a formidable fighting character. I loved that from the beginning. I feel that *Star Wars*

04 Padmé and Anakin have “Unexpected Company” in the form of Ahsoka Tano (Ashley Eckstein.)

05 Catherine Taber again voices Padmé Amidala in *Forces of Destiny*.

has always made an effort towards that, and it continues to be that way.

Forces of Destiny highlighting the female characters specifically is really, really cool, but those characters did already exist in the *Star Wars* universe. *Star Wars* is filled with amazing, strong female characters, and always has been. And that’s another one of my favorite things about it. I’ve been really happy, too, that guys have enjoyed *Forces of Destiny* as well. Then how could they not, with something like the episode “Unexpected Company,” [Season 2, Episode 2—see sidebar] that has Anakin, Padmé, *and* Ahsoka in it? I was just blown away by that. I couldn’t believe how emotional I was after two minutes and 32 seconds! That’s testament to some good storytelling. It’s interesting how the writers, the animators, and the creators have managed to take these very small snippets of life and make them so impactful. That’s most impressive!

How did you get into acting?

I always wanted to be an actress, so I moved from Georgia—the state, not the country—to Los Angeles. I did the proverbial “drive across the country” thing, where I knew nothing and no one. I just came here like a bunch of other dreamers and started working a bunch of crazy jobs. Then, one day, I fell into some voice-over opportunities.

“I was a huge science-fiction and *Star Wars* fan, and I always attribute that to why I got the role. Because when you’re working in sci-fi and fantasy, you can’t condescend to the material.”

Someone recommended me to an agent and then my second audition was for a video game called *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. So that started my *Star Wars* career!

Wasn’t Mission Vao in *Knights of the Old Republic* your first voice-over job?

It was! I remember going in for the audition and not realizing that it was actually a rather large role. My agent at the time said, “Maybe don’t tell them that it’s your first job!” The audition was with Darragh O’Farrell (senior manager of audio at LucasArts), who was with the company for a very long time, and whom a lot of people know and adore. But I had no idea what I was getting into.

So very much a baptism of fire...?

Yes! But I was a huge science-fiction and *Star Wars* fan, and I always attribute that to why I got the role. Because when you’re working in sci-fi and fantasy, you can’t condescend to the material. And if you love that stuff, it’s really easy not to do that, and to understand what the worlds are like. I felt like I knew that galaxy far, far away pretty well.

Do you find it tough having to learn alien phrases and references?

No, I love it. When we were doing *Knights of the Old Republic*, we invented things as we were going along. At one point, the script had a reference to pretzels, and we said: “You can’t say pretzels. There are no pretzels in *Star Wars*!” So, we had this unique opportunity to make ▶



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► something up on the spot. I think we came up with Tarisian Ale Nuts. That's kind of cool because, in a small way, you're creating history. I don't know if anyone's packaged and commercialized Tarisian Ale Nuts yet. It's not a bad idea.

What's your first memory of *Star Wars*?

Well, I wish I had some great story like Dee Bradley Baker (Captain Rex in *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*). He has a story where he worked at a local movie theater and dressed up as a Jawa—I think it was a Jawa, not an Ewok—but because I don't have an amazing story, I always tell his! For me, it was always there. I honestly can't remember a time when there wasn't *Star Wars*. I was always such a fan of Princess Leia. One of the funny things that I remember—I'm not sure exactly when it happened—was when I went from having a crush on Luke to having a crush on Han! Is that some rite of passage? I'm not sure.

Well it worked out all right for Leia...

Yes, that's very true!

And if you had to dress up as a Jawa or an Ewok, which would you choose?

Probably a Jawa. Less furry. Slightly better physique.

06 Padmé was also voiced by Catherine Taber in *The Clone Wars*.

Have you ever done cosplay?

Not specifically for its own purpose, but I did dress up as Padmé for a short film called *Hughes The Force* [a 2011 pastiche of *Star Wars* and the films of John Hughes]. That is a really great little film. James Arnold Taylor played Obi-Wan in that. I've dressed Padmé-esque for costume parties, and I've dressed as Leia before, but for *Star Wars* events, as opposed to being a convention-goer and dressing as a character.

What was your very first convention experience?

The first convention I did was San Diego Comic-Con! I wasn't there specifically for *Star Wars*, but I had just done Knights of the Old Republic. These big tough guys were coming up to me, practically with tears in their eyes, apologizing because they chose the darkest path they could in the game, which was to have my Wookiee partner Zaalbar actually kill me! It still happens sometimes. People will say: "That's the worst thing I ever did, is have Zaalbar kill mission." They really feel bad, it's fascinating. I always tell them it's OK, and next time to choose the light side!

What do you enjoy most about such conventions?

I especially enjoy it when we get to do some kind of performance as



Destiny Calling

Catherine Taber's appearances as Padmé Amidala:

SEASON ONE:

"The Imposter Inside"

Padmé must defend herself against an assassin, with the assistance of Ahsoka Tano.

"The Starfighter Stunt"

Ahsoka is training Padmé how to pilot a fighter when a droid starfighter attacks them.

SEASON TWO:

"Unexpected Company"

Ahsoka joins Anakin and Padmé on a mission through a Separatist blockade.

"Monster Misunderstanding"

Padmé's quick-thinking saves a young creature from poachers.

a cast. I was blessed to be a part of Kyle Newman's *Smugglers* series [of fan-made *Star Wars* audio dramas], where I got to play Leia in a live stage show. That will forever be one of my favorite things to have done. To play that character, with all the people I was working with, for that fanbase. It was just magical.

Can you define what it is about *Star Wars* that speaks to such a wide audience?

Honestly, I think it's the underlying theme of good versus evil. It's one of the things I love about sci-fi in general. It's particularly what I love about Padmé. She's full of integrity and inherently tries to do the right thing for the right reasons. All of us have that innate desire to be part of something bigger than ourselves, and I like being part of that.



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Hera Syndulla

V A N E S S A M A R S H A L L

***Star Wars Rebels* may be over, but Hera Syndulla lives on in *Forces of Destiny*! Voice actor Vanessa Marshall tells *Insider* what the *Star Wars* universe means to her, both as a performer and as a fan.**

WORDS: MEGAN CROUSE

***Star Wars Insider*: What has the overall *Star Wars* experience been like for you, as a participant and as a fan?**

It's been amazing. I have made so many friends that I'll know forever and ever. I feel like I have a whole new family. I have loved each of the Celebrations I've gone to, and the various conventions. I've gotten to meet really amazing people in the fan community. It was insane to hear Hera's name mentioned in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, and I was grateful that I also got to voice one of the fighter pilots in *Rogue One*, too. I never thought I'd have anything to do with the films, so that just made my head explode. I'll never forget that. I'm looking forward to the next Celebration, and I really am so grateful that this is something that will continue even though *Rebels* has ended. It's so lovely to know that I'll never be alone again. We all have each other forever and ever. When every film comes out we'll all freak out together, and wait in line, and that's really special.

What do you think you'll miss most about working on *Rebels*?

I'm definitely going to miss recording sessions together. We always had so much fun. It was



FOREVER YOUNG

Vanessa Marshall was no stranger to the *Star Wars* universe when she was cast as Hera Syndulla in *Star Wars Rebels*. She had already portrayed Alderaanian intelligence operative Jan Ors in the classic *Star Wars: Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* video game, and provided many additional voices for *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords*—both of which are just a tiny representation of her extensive résumé of voice work across animated series, movies, and gaming titles. Marshall reprised her role as Hera once again for the second series of *Forces of Destiny*, which recently completed airing on YouTube and the Disney Channel.

Marshall has also been a contributor to *Star Wars Insider*, writing about her passion for the films.

great to meet up every Thursday and go on these adventures in space! It was an honor to get to go to Skywalker Ranch and see the facility, too. We all went up there as a group. We really have bonded as a family, and I'm really grateful for that. That will last beyond the finale, I'm sure.

How did the recording sessions for *Forces of Destiny* differ from those for *Star Wars Rebels*?

With *Forces of Destiny*, we're all by ourselves when we're recording, therefore I don't get to interact with whomever is playing opposite Hera and I have to imagine the situation we're in, which is similar to how we work on a video game. Whereas in *Rebels* we were always together and acting off of one another, we had that intimacy, and that immediate sense of comedy and drama. *Forces of Destiny* recordings are also a bit faster, because the episodes are much shorter.

You give Hera's voice a sense of both steel and warmth. How do you go about achieving that?

I don't really think about a sound when I create a character. I think more about their intentions and the stakes at hand, so the sound that is born out of those very

► real circumstances may sound warm or powerful. Hopefully it has complexity. Whenever I go for a specific voice rather than going through a character's mind, heart, and soul, it ends up sounding like affectation. So, for Hera, I make sure I'm very clear on what she wants and why she wants it, and through that the voice was developed.

Do you have a favorite Hera moment, from either *Rebels* or *Forces of Destiny*?

My favorite moment in terms of getting to know her was in "Wings of the Master," (Season Two, Episode Seven) where she gets to fly the B-wing, and we learn why flight is so important to her. My father is also a pilot, so flying happens to mean a lot to me, too, and I understand how much flight means to him. So I can really key in to a person's need to be up in the clouds for a little bit and get perspective.

Throughout the series, there were a number of other significant moments too. The things that happened with her father, and her experience with Thrawn, which helped Hera to realize who her true family is, and that she doesn't need a Kalikori [a Twi'lek family heirloom passed down through the generations]. Also, watching Sabine really claim her space and take her power. When Hera was devastated after Kanan's death, I think it meant a lot to her to see Sabine grow in that way. And that was satisfying for me to see, too.

How did you feel when Hera and Kanan finally confessed their love for one another?

I was intrigued, because up until then I think the relationship was somewhat ambiguous. Hera has an affection for Kanan, and she always has, but there wasn't a lot of time to profess that love, if you will, given what was going on around them. So, it was nice that they finally got a moment to share that. I think it was a sort of relief for the character. I know that at the very end she regretted waiting so long, but I think there were other priorities. Prior to that, she always had to handle what was in front of her, but I think she was happy to be able to say it when she could.

It was a big change from how closely she played things to her chest in the first season.

I don't think she was secretive, necessarily, but she was perhaps more focused on building the Rebel Alliance. She's trying to do her job and put aside any personal desires that she may have had in order to complete something that was way more important. That may have come off as being secretive to those watching—or to Kanan! But I think it was a strategy, and it was working, because they

"For Hera, I make sure I'm very clear on what she wants and why she wants it, and through that the voice was developed."

07 Vanessa Marshall as Hera Syndulla in *Star Wars Rebels*.

08 Tiya Sircar (Sabine Wren) joined Marshall in several *Forces of Destiny* episodes.

09 Hera gets help from "Chopper and Friends."

were building and getting stronger and getting results. There wasn't that distraction of romance, which, given the stakes, would have been somewhat self-indulgent for Hera. It's not that the stakes got any less when she did confess her love, it's that they got so heated that it was maybe the only time she could see it.

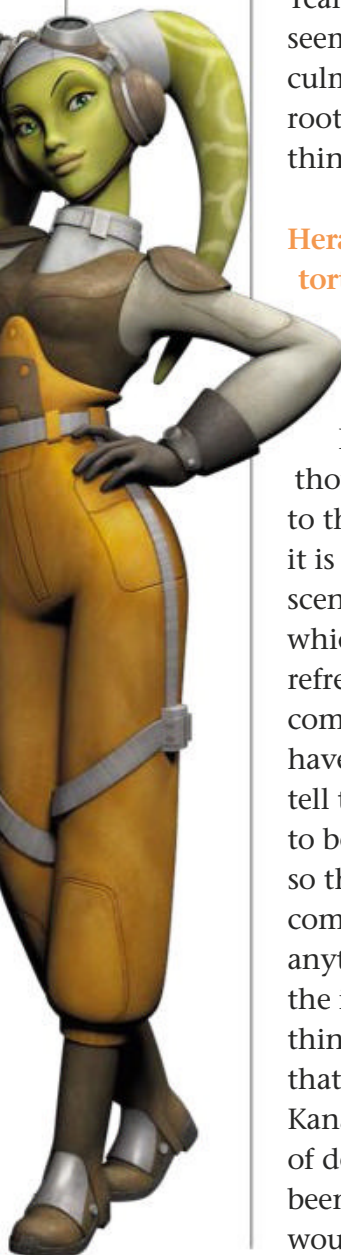
I don't know that it was a secret to Kanan necessarily. I think both of them knew they had this affection, but they just didn't have the time to explore it, given what was going on.

Were you eager to see how fans would react?

Yeah, and as far as I can tell people seem pretty thrilled. It was the culmination of so many people rooting for them in that way. I think it was really satisfying.

Hera was woozy from being tortured by Governor Pryce's interrogation droid at that point. How did you feel about playing those scenes?

I thought it would be fun! I thought it was a great way to get to the heart of that scene, because it is a pretty intense, almost violent scene. But it builds with comedy which is so *Star Wars*. I found it refreshing. I've read some online comments that said it shouldn't have taken a drug to make Hera tell the truth, but she happened to be caught by the Empire and so that happened. I think Hera's completely capable of doing anything she did with or without the interrogation drug, and I didn't think it necessarily took away from that powerful conversation with Kanan. I thought it brought a kind of depth to that scene. If it had been one note and very serious, it wouldn't have been as interesting.



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I really liked how it was written, and I was excited to do it.

And then she loses him. How does Hera feel after Kanan's death?

Devastated. For the first time, she has no idea what to do. For the first time that great strategizing mind was completely empty. It's not until Ezra gives her hope again that she can even see a way forward. Given that she now has a son, perhaps that's a piece of Kanan to take with her, and maybe she feels a little bit better that she's not all by herself.

"We always had so much fun. It was great to meet up every Thursday and go on these adventures in space!"

That was a big surprise, to find out that Kanan and Hera had a child.

I was shocked! I couldn't believe it for a million reasons. I had no idea. It took me a minute to get my mind around it, but I think it's awesome.

You mentioned Celebration and other convention appearances before. Is interaction with fans important to you?

A couple of years ago I was at a DragonCon in Atlanta and a father thanked me after I'd signed something for his son. He said: "My son is autistic, and he only interacts with people and speaks when Hera is on television. There is something about Hera as a character that soothes him. So, I want you to know that you didn't just give someone an



Destiny Calling

Vanessa Marshall's appearances as Hera Syndulla:

SEASON ONE:

"Newest Recruit"

Hera airlifts Sabine and new rebel ally Ketsu Onyo out of a sticky situation.

"An Imperial Feast"

Hera Syndulla encounters Han Solo on Endor, and they make a bargain over rations for the Ewoks.

"Crash Course"

Sabine learns a valuable lesson in forgiveness from Hera on a covert mission on the planet Garel.

SEASON TWO:

"Hasty Departure"

Hera and Sabine mistakenly steal the wrong Imperial shuttle, which is already fully-loaded with passengers—Imperial stormtroopers!

"Chopper and Friends"

Chopper has recruited a couple of Ewoks, and Hera learns how resourceful the diminutive furry creatures can be.

autograph. What you have done and what you did today means the world to him and to me as a father, and I can't thank you enough."

It was a powerful moment, and we both started crying. The fact that *Star Wars* connects us all, across all barriers was really evident that day.

Rebels isn't just a cartoon, and *Star Wars* is not just some movie series. It really is a way of life. 🌟

The *Star Wars* Archive

Lights! Camera! Action!
Rare images from the
Star Wars photo archives.





Anthony Daniels, minus his C-3PO head, rehearses for a scene aboard Senator Amidala's yacht. *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002).

A black and white close-up portrait of Kieron Gillen. He is wearing glasses and has a beard. The image is framed by a thin orange border.

KIERON GILLEN

HOLDING VADER'S LEASH

Insider meets *Star Wars* writer Kieron Gillen, who has documented Darth Vader's fall and rise for Marvel Comics, introduced new fan favorite Doctor Aphra, and continues to steer the Rebellion from one devastating Imperial encounter to the next.

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT

F

or someone who's a master storyteller, Kieron Gillen is the first to admit that his own road to *Star Wars* wasn't quite as

dramatic a tale as readers might have expected, given his recent Marvel Comics run. "I picked up the phone and it was Jordan White, Marvel's *Star Wars* editor at that time. He said, 'Kieron, do you want to write the *Darth Vader* comic?' To which I replied, 'I'll think about it.' You would think I'd just say yes," he grins. "It's *Darth Vader* for God's sake!"

At San Diego Comic-Con in July 2014, Marvel announced that it would be publishing three new *Star Wars* titles, causing much fan excitement. As the saga prepared to return to its original comic-book home after almost 30 years away, the new program would see Jason Aaron take over writing duties on the lead book, while Gillen, best known for his superhero writing for Marvel, would pen *Darth Vader*.

"I was very aware that this would be the official story, and I was also very aware that only one person gets to do this," he recalls. "Was I the person for the job? I went away and thought to myself, 'Actually, I probably am.' I write a lot of bad people, so I could see why they wanted to give me the job!"

For some, grasping the reins of one of pop culture's most iconic villains may have seemed a daunting task, but not so for Gillen, who was clear on where his tenure in charge would take him. He wanted to create a "logical middle chapter" for the character, set between *A New Hope* (1977) and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). The result was one of the best *Star Wars* comics ever to see print—and it almost didn't come to fruition. "The weird thing was, I'd sort of said I wasn't going to do any more work-for-hire," the writer recalls. "I said *Darth Vader* would be my last work-for-hire for a while. I really see *Darth Vader*, *Doctor Aphra*, and *Star Wars* as one job because I don't really consider that I ever stopped writing one book—despite the fact they're all very clearly different books."

Fall And Rise

Presented with the opportunity to play with George Lucas' visionary series, Gillen is quick to point out just how much freedom he and the other comic scribes have to expand the *Star Wars* universe, and how Marvel encourages its writers to "pitch big" with storylines.

"At the end of *A New Hope*, *Darth Vader* is one of the sole survivors of one of the biggest military disasters of all time," he says. "It's literally a plan 20 years in the making—build a Death Star and subjugate the galaxy—

"WE WEREN'T TRYING TO DO COMICS THAT WERE BASED ON *STAR WARS*, WE WERE TRYING TO DO *STAR WARS* ON PAPER."

and it's just gone belly up. Vader's going to get hammered. If I was his boss, I'd be angry at him!"

However difficult Vader's predicament may have been, it provided Gillen with the building blocks for his series. "At the start of *Empire*, Vader is more powerful than he ever was in *A New Hope*," the writer elaborates. "He's the head of the *Executor*, has a big fleet, and he's killing people left, right, and center. He doesn't do that in *A New Hope*. So what's the story *between* the two films? It's the fall and rise of *Darth Vader*. That was the basic backbone of the series.

"Of course, Vader also discovered Luke; he discovered he had a son and he realized that the last 20 years had been a lie. These were all really big, meaty things, so I went in to Marvel and that's what I pitched. Why on earth would you pitch anything else? If you wanted the biggest, most important story, that was the only sensible thing to pitch."

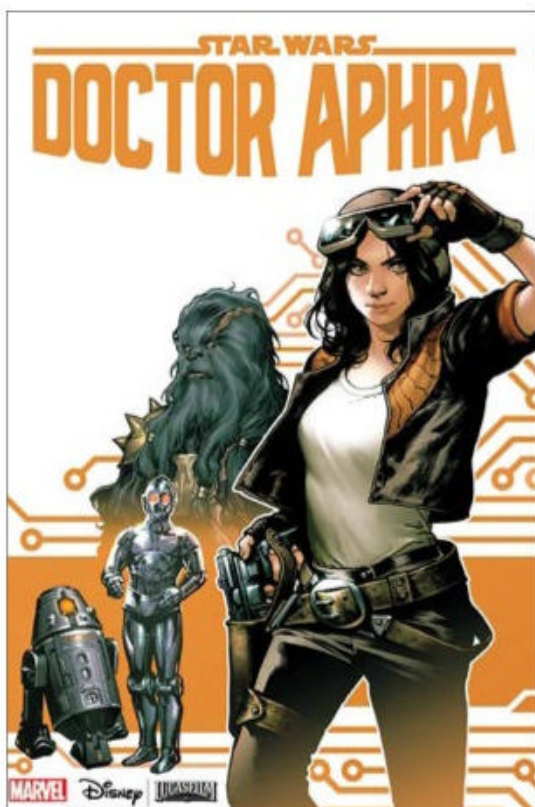
The biggest, most important story is a concept that's important to Gillen, and if there's one thing he keeps coming back to during our interview, it's the notion of "*Star Wars* on paper."

"We didn't do internal narrative," he explains. "We chose to frame shots, so the comic looked like *Star Wars*. We weren't trying to do comics that were based on *Star Wars*, we were trying to do *Star Wars* on paper." And it's something they've succeeded in achieving. The worlds of *Star Wars* are bigger than ever, and along with ambitious storylines, Gillen reveals that he was encouraged

01 *Doctor Aphra* Issue 1. Cover art by Kamome Shirahama.

02 *Darth Vader* Issue 1. Cover art by Adi Granov.

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► to create new characters to inhabit these new tales.

"We're running a big universe. It's an enormous galaxy. Not every bounty hunter works for Jabba the Hutt," he explains. "Everybody in the cantina is interesting. You know that everyone in the cantina has a great story and we get to tell it; but if you tell these stories, you have to do more: they have to have a really cool friend. So whatever you do with *Star Wars*, it's fractal. That's the approach the storybooks take. They want to create new stuff that feels like *Star Wars*. That's the trick."

The Aphra Inversion

One such character is archaeologist Doctor Aphra. Originally created by Gillen as a foil for the *Darth Vader* series, she became a huge success and was promoted to her own book in December 2016—although she very nearly didn't make it. "I thought all the way through to the end that she was going to die," the writer reveals of his original plans for the character. "I couldn't work out a way for her to escape, but then I found a way for her to absolutely escape, and it didn't diminish Vader."

That may have worked out well for everyone—but where did the original character idea come from? "My approach is to work with archetypes that were

not properly in *Star Wars*, and that led to people like Aphra," he shares of his thought process. "That's me thinking, 'Ethically inverted Indiana Jones, that makes a lot of sense.'"

"A lot of my tactics were basically a simple inversion. I made it feel like *Star Wars*, but a dark *Star Wars*, by flipping the movie characters," he shares. "Aphra is primarily a roguish Han Solo. The droids Beetee-One and Triple-Zero are very obvious, Black Krrsantan the Wookiee is really obvious. Then you get people like Trios, who's an inverted Leia. They've all got their own spin. The two cyborg twins were like dark Luke and Leia. How *Star Wars* could look in a mirror universe was how I built it up. The droids are the most obvious version of that—the other ones are subtler!"

When it comes to Aphra getting her own series, Gillen quite readily admits that he was "petrified" at the idea, but when he realized how popular she had become, the writer once again delayed his plans to take a break from writing for hire, opting instead to bring his wayward creation's adventures to the page. In fact, Gillen even found himself giving some thought to who could play Aphra, should the opportunity for a live-action version of the series ever present itself. "I asked Twitter," he grins, "and Ellen Wong, who played Knives Chau

03 *Star Wars* Issue 50
Hope Dies Part 1.
Variant cover art by Terry Dodson.

04 *Darth Vader* Issue 25.
Variant cover art by John Tyler Christopher.

05 *Darth Vader* Issue 13.
Cover art by Mark Brooks.

"FOR ME, WRITING IS A PROCESS OF DISCOVERY. ALL I KNEW IS THAT APHRA WOULD NOT FALL IN LOVE WITH DARTH VADER."

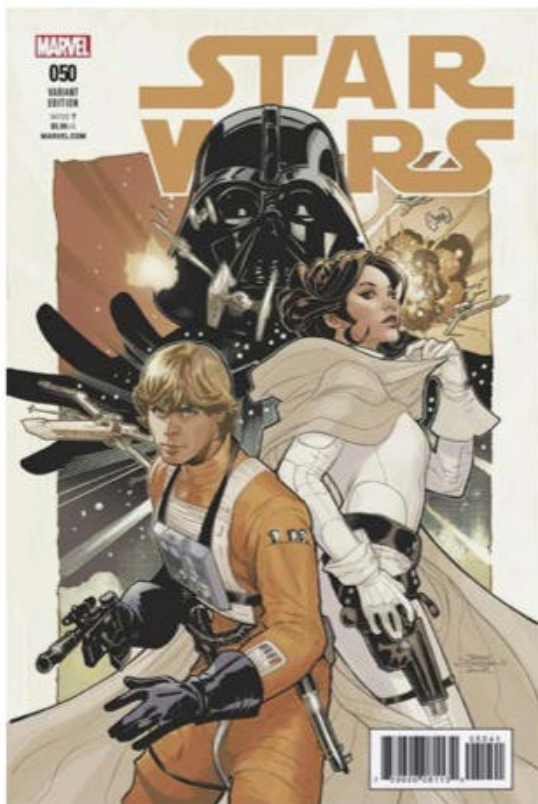
in *Scott Pilgrim Vs. the World* (2010) was a very popular choice. There's a bit of Knives Chau in Aphra, in terms of her aggressive, slightly broken kookiness."

Out There

Another notable element of Aphra's character arc was the decision to have her come out and begin a relationship with Imperial officer Magna Tolvan. So was there a conscious decision on Gillen's part to introduce an LGBT+ character to the series? The writer considers the question for a moment. "That crept up on me," he eventually says. "For me, writing is a process of discovery. All I knew is that Aphra would not fall in love with Darth Vader. My characters tend to be flirty, so it creeps across anyway, but I didn't want her to have daddy issues. Not that it stopped people on the internet thinking that. When she came out to her dad at the end of the first Aphra arc, it was more a question of 'Do people actually come out in the *Star Wars* universe?' They don't—it's just something that they do. It just felt quite natural, and it really lent to some interesting drama."

"Readers tend to respond to Aphra very well," Gillen says. "People looking for Asian or LGBT+ representation in a book are really happy with her. The thing is, Aphra's not exactly a 'positive' representation, but she's interesting. She's a lesbian character and she's a hot mess—in a very human way! She makes mistakes and that makes her quite compelling. People see that she's not in any way perfect—almost the opposite. And she hung out with Darth Vader for 25 issues, so she is a really bad person. People quite like that!"

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THE BOOK OF KIERON

Born in the U.K. in 1975, Kieron Gillen began his publishing career as a music and video-games journalist before realizing that he had a flare for comic writing.

After relinquishing a full-time job in journalism in order to pursue his love of comic books, Gillen plied his trade as an indie-comic scribe before landing writing gigs for such well-known companies as Avatar Press, Boom, and Image Comics, where he penned a diverse range of titles including, among others, *Uber* (an alternate reality WWII series), and *Warhammer*—the official comic of the ever-popular role-playing game.

Soon after, he moved to Marvel Comics where he carved out a successful name for himself writing for seminal titles including *Uncanny X-Men*, *Thor*, *Iron Man*, and *The Young Avengers*. His successful tenures on these key titles eventually led to him taking the helm on *Darth Vader* and, ultimately, the ongoing *Star Wars* comic.

Throughout his career Gillen has frequently collaborated with comic artist Jamie McKelvie. In 2006 the pair launched the long-running Britpop-inspired comic and graphic novel series *Phonogram*, which enabled Gillen to return to his love of music. Coming to an end in 2016, Gillen has since continued to pen several more tales with McKelvie, including the acclaimed series *The Wicked and the Divine* which launched in 2014.

However, when it came to finally leaving *Aphra* behind, Gillen didn't find it difficult—or not *too* difficult, at least—and the series continues to be successful under the helm of writer Si Spurrier.

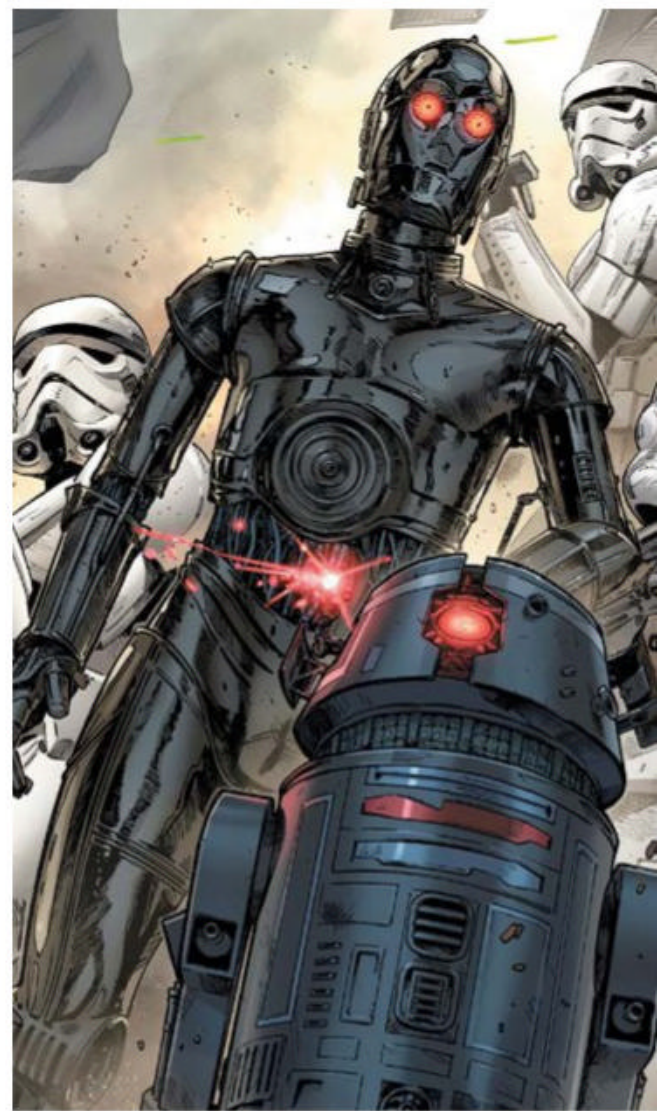
"Part of you goes, 'I don't think my *Aphra* would've said that,'" the writer shares, "but the other side is that characters in a shared universe don't feel really real until someone else has written them. To become part of the universe they have to be taken away from you. It's actually quite a thrill to see people have their own take on *Aphra*." Besides, Gillen had much bigger tasks ahead of him, as it was early on during his run on *Doctor Aphra* that he was approached to take over writing on the main *Star Wars* title. Surely that must have been a watershed moment in his creative career?

"I should've said this earlier, but doing the *Darth Vader* comic should have blown my brain," he tries to explain. "The first movie I saw in the cinema, ever, was *The Empire Strikes Back*. So essentially, I was writing the prequel to my own introduction to this pop culture icon. I was literally writing my own origin story—and I was fine! I kept on thinking, 'One day my brain's gonna fry,' but it didn't. It's almost like I feel [puts on a deep voice], 'I was born to do this, I am the chosen one!' But joking aside, it was really very natural for me to write it. So when I started doing *Star Wars*, it was a bit like that."

Pitch Perfect

With plans to again "pitch big" at the forefront of his mind, Gillen took a logical approach to how he would continue to create a storyline, to accommodate the noticeable shift in tone from *A New Hope* to that of *The Empire Strikes Back*. "I wanted something big for issue 50," he says of the recently published landmark edition. "We billed it as 'Hope Dies.' I wanted to do big, stately, enormous, space, with the entire six-issues focused around this battle. A lot of really big things happen, constantly. I wanted to treat the first issue like the start of a movie, in case people were just jumping on. We took it a little slowly, building the tension. We

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knew what was going to happen as we built to an explosion where everyone knew how bad a position they were in. This was definitely me trying to write more cinematically.

"It's certainly a storyline that fits '*Star Wars* on paper' perfectly," the writer says. "It's big, it has cliffhangers that will make you gasp, and there's a bleakness that's

"I'VE BEEN SLOWLY MOVING STUFF INTO PLACE ACROSS MY FIRST 12 ISSUES AND NOW IT'S TIME TO KNOCK 'EM ALL DOWN."



creeping in that will be all-too-familiar to fans of *Empire*.

"All the stories to this point have been heading away from *A New Hope*—and this is heading toward *Empire*," Gillen states. "The actual emotional tone is much closer to that movie. It's called 'Hope Dies' because it's *literally* the end of *A New Hope*. So that was all intended, and hopefully it carries on coming across in the writing."

Gillen explains that, despite his original intentions to leave the *Star Wars* universe behind several years ago, he's still enjoying himself. "It's great," he grins. "I'm the sort of writer who thrives on set-up. I've been slowly moving stuff into place across my first 12 issues and now it's time to knock 'em all down. What haven't we seen before? What do we want to see? What works really well? There's a dogfight I really like, there's a

06 *Beetee-One* and *Triple-Zero* are inversions of C3PO and R2-D2.

07 *Star Wars* Issue 44. Cover art by David Marquez.

08 Issue 38 was Gillen's first on the main *Star Wars* title. Cover art by David Marquez.

good bit with Luke leading some troops. Pretty much the final beat in each issue is a punch-the-air moment or a 'No!' moment."

So does this new-found love for the format mean that Gillen is in no hurry to give up working for hire? He laughs. "I don't know. It's the same as with *Vader*—I have a story, and I know the end of the story. It'll form a beginning, middle and end, and it'll make a nice thick volume. After that, I don't know! If you'd asked me at this stage in *Vader* I'd have said, 'Oh no, I'm finished here.' I've got the James Bond thing of 'Never say never again.'"

As elusive as ever, perhaps a more direct line of questioning is in order—like why it took him so long to write for *Star Wars* when it's clearly a universe he loves. "My background is as an indie creator," he explains. "I came up doing my own books—I still do my own books.

I don't tend to hunt stuff down; I tend to see what comes to me. I'm the person sat at the bar trying to be pretty and waiting for people to hit on me. I ended up on *Star Wars* literally because Jordan phoned me and asked me. I just put the work out there and people respond to it."

Speaking of responding to things, Gillen's tales have been applauded by comic book fans, so how has he found becoming part of the *Star Wars* family? "*Star Wars* fans are amazing. The variety of fans you meet. I get the youngest readers I've ever had, as well as people that are much older than I am. It's a whole spectrum of humanity.

"One of the things I always think, as a work-for-hire writer is: 'What would my mum like?' *Star Wars* is for everybody, and I want to appeal to the hardcore person who knows the name of every ship as well as those who think, 'Oh my god, that spaceship just shot that other spaceship!' That's part of the communal storytelling experience. It's fun." 🙌



May The Furs Be With You

What were the Ewoks actually good for? Were they really only created in order to sell soft toys? Crank up the Yub Nub song as *Insider* shakes a spear at the diminutive critters' critics...

WORDS: DARREN SCOTT



t's well-known *Star Wars* lore that the original movies were supposed to end with the primitive Wookiees assisting in the downfall of the hi-tech Empire in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983). But, as George Lucas explained in a 2004 DVD commentary, once it was established that Chewbacca was able to pilot a starship and repair its technology, the Wookiees of Kashyyyk just didn't seem sufficiently Stone Age.



01 C-3PO (Anthony Daniels) finds he's unexpectedly become an Ewok delty, in *Return of the Jedi* (1983).



Leader Of The Pack

Wicket W. Warrick became the focal character for the entire Ewok species, and is the Ewok who has appeared the most across cinema, television, books, and comics. What's more, the character would go on to change the life of the actor beneath the fur...

It's all thanks to his grandmother that Warwick Davis became linked to the greatest science-fantasy saga of all time. She heard an advert on the radio seeking short actors, and the 11-year-old was soon snapped up for *Return of the Jedi*. Initially, he was to play an unnamed Ewok, but when *Star Wars* legend Kenny Baker (R2-D2) took ill with food poisoning, Davis' performance caught the eye of George Lucas, and he won the role of Wicket.

He was paid the princely sum of £60 per day (around \$90 at the time), but has since said he'd have done it for free. Let's face it, what 11-year-old wouldn't have—especially when Mark Hamill was on hand to give you every *Star Wars* action figure you didn't already have.

Davis went on to play Wicket in two made-for-television Ewok movies, *Caravan of Courage* (1984) and *Ewoks: The Battle For Endor* (1985), and the character gained the second name 'Warrick' in Davis' honor. In 1988, he also took the title role in George Lucas' *Willow*. To date, he has appeared in seven *Star Wars* movies, invariably playing characters with names beginning with 'W', and also provided the voice of Rukh in *Star Wars Rebels*. In 2011, he starred in his own sitcom, *Life's Too Short*, and he appears as Professor Filius Flitwick in all eight of the *Harry Potter* movies.

And yet, Lucas was still wedded to this idea of simple bravery overcoming mechanical might, so he came up with a whole new species. Using the Wookiees as a starting point, Lucas has said that he "basically cut 'em in half and called them Ewoks." It sounds brutal—or not, depending on how you feel about Ewoks—but it's essentially true. Even the name is roughly half of the word "Wookiee" (though actually derived from the Miwok tribe, a group of four Native American subcultures indigenous to North California, where the Endor scenes were filmed).

Despite this simple origin story for the Ewoks, rumors persist that they were, in fact, conceived first and foremost for merchandising. Lucas supposedly said that Jedi was "designed for kids," but by 1983, *Star Wars* was already a kid-friendly merchandising juggernaut. There's no reason why there couldn't have been a whole range of cuddly Wookiee toys and collectibles if the Ewoks had never been invented.

The fact of the matter is that the Ewoks served a story purpose, and served it well. They aren't simply less technologically advanced than Chewbacca, they are surprising ►

► in a way that a Wookiee is not. When you see Chewie for the first time, you immediately know that he is a powerful, potentially savage presence. You're intimidated. Or at least you should be, if you have any sense. With a diminutive Ewok, not so much.

Designed to look cute, they come across as halfway between a teddy bear and a pet, rather than the sentient equal that is a Wookiee. Though both the Ewoks and Chewbacca were based on Lucas' own dogs, they channel very different qualities found in those pets. Chewie is the loyal, noble companion, while the Ewoks are the feral, probably not housebroken handfuls that we forgive because they are so darned sweet-looking.

Because, of course, Ewoks are not really teddy bears at all. "Keep them a little cuddly, so we want to hug them," Lucas reportedly said to Jedi director Richard Marquand, knowing full well that he was laying a trap for the audience as effective as one of the Endor native's own nets. We are invited to underestimate the Ewoks just as the Empire does, which could never have been the case if the story was set on Kashyyyk.

When Wicket and Leia first meet, the smallest Ewok of all doesn't attack. He's tentative but inquisitive. Almost pug-like, he's easily won over by food. We've already noted that Lucas was

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inspired by his dogs (not pugs, but Griffon Bruxellois, which sounds like a *Star Wars* character in itself), but for this scene, actor Warwick Davis based his head tilt on his own canine companion. Today, the inspiration has come full circle, with many a *Star Wars* fan using pet fancy dress to make their dogs look more like Ewoks!

From beginning to Endor

Lucas developed the look of the Ewoks with concept artist Joe Johnston, beginning with a design that looked somewhat like a top-heavy, two-legged dog. Not entirely practical when winning a war, it's also hard to imagine how these creatures would have been realized other than as puppets. However, Johnson and Lucas soon settled on a humanoid form that not only suited a costumed actor, but also invited more immediate trust from the audience.

The intention was to create a species that couldn't be more different from the familiar look of the Empire. And, though stormtroopers are also humanoid, nothing about their sterile armor and blank 'faces' conjures up a

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02 Inquisitive Ewok Wicket (Warwick Davies) isn't sure what to make of Leia.

03 The Ewok's unkempt fur and rough clothing was a direct contrast to the sterility of the Empire.

sense of living warmth. The Ewoks, conversely, look warm in every sense. Their fur and rudimentary fabric hoods look tactile and unruly—the exact opposite of the identically outfitted Imperials.

It isn't just a look, either: the Ewoks live a freewheeling, unpredictable life, driven by factors such as the changing seasons, their mystical beliefs, and an innate animal playfulness. It's a far cry from the regimented order of the Empire, where technology outranks nature, and there is cachet in being more machine than man.

Even Ewok language resists the dull conformity of Galactic Basic—as seemingly spoken everywhere else where the forces of Empire hold sway. Their comical babble sounds hopelessly random (though it is very cleverly directed and performed to convey more than is immediately obvious), and, at first, other characters—and much of the audience—credit their voices as having no more meaning than, for example, birdsong.

That everybody underestimates the Ewoks contributes to their very survival and their eventual victory against the Empire, but



We Are Family

There are 73 actors listed as Ewoks in the cast of *Return of the Jedi*. Five are named characters (Wicket, Paploo, Teebo, Chief Chirpa, and Logray), two are 'Ewok Warriors,' and the remaining 66 are credited simply as 'Ewoks' (though many have been named in other media, including the Kenner toy range).

According to Kevin Thompson, who played the Ewok later identified as Chubbray, "Probably over 150 people tried out" for the chance to be an Ewok. Speaking at *Star Wars* Celebration in 2015, he added that it was hard work for the successful applicants, with at least 10 actors quitting the film along the way. Thompson stayed the course however, performing a variety of stunts and returning to portray Chukha-Trok in the TV movie *Caravan of Courage*, as well as doing most of the stunts in its follow up, *Ewoks: The Battle For Endor*.

Debbie Lee Carrington played the Ewok now known as Romba in *Return of the Jedi*, and then Weechee in *Caravan of Courage*. She also did stunt work in *The Battle For Endor*. "The costumes were like saunas," she later commented. "The

wardrobe people were constantly bringing us Gatorade." After a successful acting career that included the movies *Total Recall* (1990) and *Men in Black* (1997), Carrington passed away in March 2018.

Several of the other Ewoks were *Star Wars* veterans by 1983. Jane Busby, who played Chief Chirpa, and Mike Edmonds, who played Logray, both had uncredited roles as Ugnaughts in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), as did Jack Purvis, who played Teebo. In fact, Purvis appeared in *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) and *The Empire Strikes Back* as a variety of creatures, and is the only actor to be credited as different characters in all three installments of the original trilogy. His teenage daughter, Katie Purvis, also appeared in *Jedi* as an Ewok mother, cradling her Wokling.

Jack Purvis died in 1997, having been a lifelong friend of Kenny Baker (pictured above). Baker, of course, is best known for playing R2-D2, but also played Paploo in *Return of the Jedi*. Having been denied the chance to play Wicket owing to illness, he instead got to pilot a speeder bike as Paploo, and inadvertently gave Warwick Davis his big break. Baker died in 2016.



An Endoring Legacy

The demise of the Empire didn't spell the end for the Ewoks on screen, and the small stars went on to appear in two TV movies and an animated TV series, all set before the events of *Return of the Jedi*, as well as in computer games, books, and a minor chart hit by Meco, "Ewok Celebration," which reached No. 60 in the Billboard Hot 100.

First shown on U.S. television in 1984, *The Ewok Adventure* was renamed *Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure* (pictured above) when it gained a limited theatrical release in Europe and the U.K. A sequel, *Ewoks: The Battle For Endor*, followed a year later.

Also dating from 1984, three children's storybooks published by Random House expanded the Ewok mythos, most notably *The Adventures of Teebo: A Tale of Magic and Suspense* by Joe Johnston, the concept artist who designed the Ewoks for *Return of the Jedi*. This book introduced elements that would feature in the animated TV series, including the swamp-dwelling Duloks.

That TV series was entitled *Ewoks*, and ran for 13 22-minute episodes in 1985, before being rebranded as *The All New Ewoks* for a further 22 11-minute episodes in 1986. Made by Nelvana and Lucasfilm, the show featured a large ensemble cast and ambitious stories that pitted the Ewoks against the Duloks.

Tying in with the TV series was a bi-monthly comic book, *Ewoks*, published by Star Comics (an imprint of Marvel Comics aimed at younger readers), and a range of action figures reflecting the art style of the show. The comic ran for 14 issues between 1985 and 1987, while the toy line featured just six figures (most of them, oddly, Duloks), all released in 1985.

More recently, Dark Horse Comics sought to pull together the continuity of the TV show and the movies in *Star Wars: Ewoks – Shadows of Endor*, a 2013 graphic novel written and drawn by Zack Giallongo, while Chuck Wendig introduced the concept of "therapy Ewoks" in his 2016 novel, *Aftermath: Life Debt*.

► the difference between how the rebels and the Empire dismiss them is what makes all the difference to how the story plays out. For the Empire, the Ewoks are beneath contempt, and so do not even factor into their plans. But for the rebels on Endor, no creature is without value, however primitive it seems. Leia's empathy, in particular, leads to a better understanding of the Ewoks than Imperial reconnaissance could ever provide, and a bond of trust is formed. In no time at all, this leads to an understanding—for the rebels and the viewer—that the Ewoks are not just pretty faces, after all.

High in the treetops, we get a glimpse of Ewok civilization: rich in the complex architecture of ladders, towers, and bridges, and with a hierarchy that affords larger, more lavish huts to its leaders. Security and defense are highly ordered affairs, with patrols and traps that are regularly checked. By the time that battle with the Empire finally comes, we have been subtly prepared for a vast Ewok arsenal of gliders, catapults, and battering rams. Each new attack is delightful and surprising, but they are never laughably unbelievable despite coming wholly out of left-field. By virtue of Leia's empathy, we are prepared where the Empire is not.

As the battle rages, we are afforded further insights into the depth of Ewok intelligence. They adapt quickly to technology, taking over Imperial speeder bikes and a scout walker with relative ease, and care about one another's wellbeing—as seen when Romba reacts to the death of fallen

The Emperor failed to factor the Endor natives into his plan, and the cost is not just the second Death Star, but the whole Empire.



The Ewoks starred in their own TV show (left), and returned in *Forces of Destiny* (right).

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compatriot Nanta. These are scenes that could work with Wookiees, but we would take them in our stride. In our fast-flowing relationship with the Ewoks, they are thrilling and touching by turn. By catching us out, they challenge us: were we as quick to dismiss the Ewoks as the Empire had?

The other shocking thing about the Ewoks, of course, is their savagery. These teddy bears have claws, and they are not only willing to fight against evil: they are also carnivores, with no qualms about eating other sentient beings. One's enemy's enemy may be a

friend, but the rebels must feel a little queasy going into battle with beings that, in other circumstances, would very happily cook them over a fire. The fact that this very nearly happens to Han is perhaps the strongest argument that these complex characters weren't conceived to sell cuddly toys.

Yet, by the end of the film, the rebels and the Ewoks are firm friends. The Emperor failed to factor the Endor natives into his plan, and the cost is not just the second Death Star, but the whole Empire. It may sound far-fetched,

04 Warwick Davis based Wicket's mannerisms on those of his pet dog.

05 Rebels and Ewoks dance for joy at the Empire's destruction.

but Lucas drew this element of the story from reality. The effectiveness of the Ewoks—who lack heavy firepower but know their territory and are willing to fight for it tooth and nail—closely mirrors the guerilla tactics of the Viet Cong, who brought the U.S. Army to a standstill at the end of the Vietnam War, despite being vastly outmatched in military might. That's not to say the Ewoks are intended to make an expressly political point—they are not—but it again goes to show that they are more than just kids' stuff.

Whichever way you look at it, the Ewoks really do offer something for everyone: Cuteness! Savagery! Silly noises! Heroics! Allegory! Take what you will and allow others the rest. It's not worth getting your yub nubs in a twist over.

So if you're a lover of our furry friends, then know that it was the Ewoks that saved the galaxy. And if you're still a hater, take comfort in the pernicious online theory that the nuclear fallout from the destruction of the Death Star would have rapidly rendered them all extinct. Those of us on team Endor know that isn't true. 🐼

Dates With Destiny

After *The All New Ewoks* TV series came to an end, it was 31 years before the Ewoks graced screens once again, in the animated microseries, *Star Wars: Forces of Destiny*. In Season 1, "Ewok Escape" tells the story of how the Ewoks came to give Leia the dress she wears at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, while "An Imperial Feast" debunks

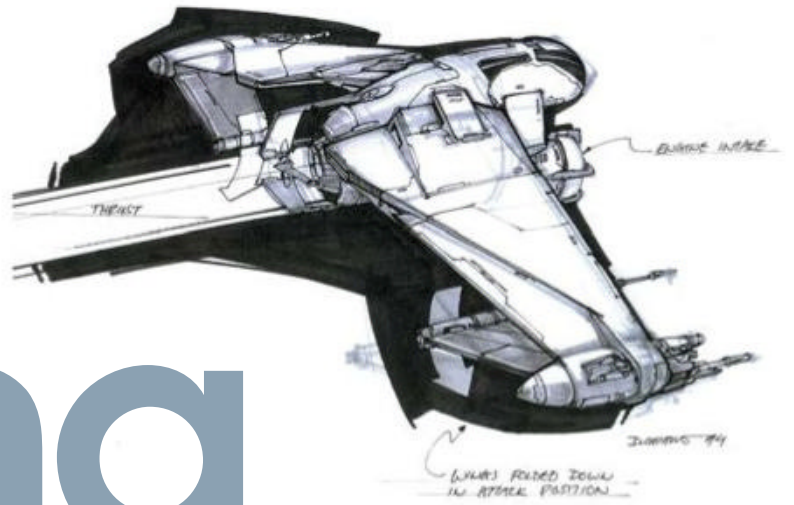
the fan theory that the Ewoks feasted on roast stormtrooper. In Season 2, "Chopper and Friends" sees the *Star Wars Rebels* droid crew the *Ghost* with a pair of Ewoks, while "Traps and Tribulations" sees Kneesaa and Wicket take on a rampaging Gorax! Shelby Young performs the voice of Kneesaa, while Dee Bradley Baker is the voice of Wicket.



Photo by Joel Aron

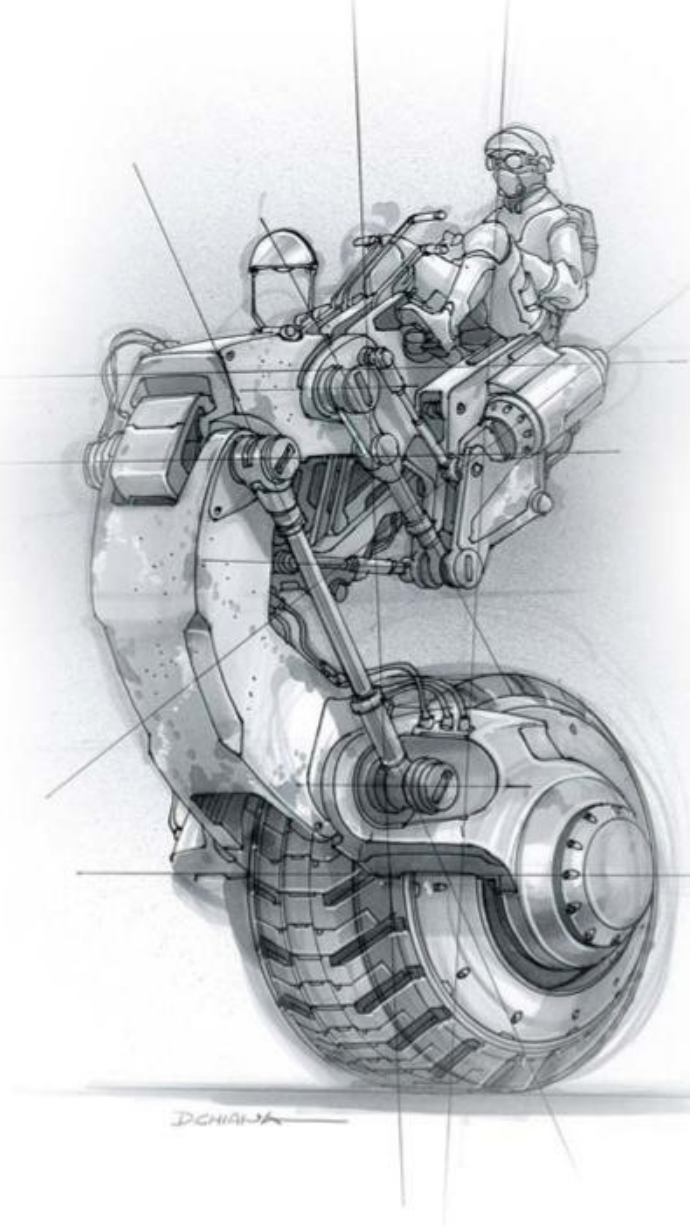
Doug Chiang

Inventing Worlds



In the first of an extensive two-part interview, *Insider* speaks to renowned concept artist, production designer, and Lucasfilm vice president Doug Chiang about his early career and landing a dream job at Industrial Light & Magic.

WORDS: TARA BENNETT



In the 41-years of the *Star Wars* universe's existence, Doug Chiang has spent 20 of them guiding the visual aesthetics of the modern era of the franchise. As the head of the Lucasfilm art department for seven years, and now as Lucasfilm Vice President and Executive Creative Director, Chiang's eye for the world George Lucas created is helping to forge the future of the galaxy. Whether it's designing the films—from the prequels to *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016)—executing theme park concepts such as *Star Wars* Galaxy's Edge, or spearheading exciting new games and media endeavors, Chiang is overseeing it all.

And yes, he's still pinching himself that he gets paid to play in the *Star Wars* sandbox every day.

It's certainly been a long and interesting journey. Born in Taiwan, and raised in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan, Chiang admits he was a very shy child as he navigated his new country with his siblings and his parents.

"Being in a new culture, it was very hard for us to fit in, so I turned inward, and I ended up just drawing all the time," he says. "Both my brother and I drew a lot. My earliest memory, from elementary ▶

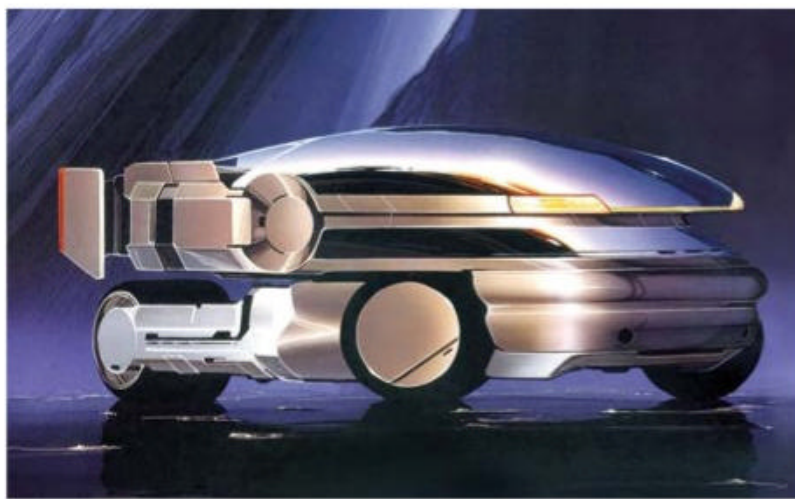
► school, is of being known as the class artist. At that time, I never really thought of it as a career. It was just a way for me to express myself, because I didn't have many friends and I didn't go out that much. But I remember being enamored by the idea of creating characters and worlds. So, a lot of my drawings were about creating stories and illustrating them."

Chiang continued drawing into his teens, but never took formal lessons or considered it an intended vocation until a fateful trip to a Michigan movie theater changed everything. "I was 15 when I saw *Star Wars* in 1977," Chiang says with a smile in his voice. "*A New Hope* was pivotal for me, because during that time I was really starting to be exposed to cinema. Things like *Star Wars* and the stop-motion animation of Ray Harryhausen started to open my eyes, because they were inventing worlds—doing things that I was kind of doing on my own, with my illustrations."

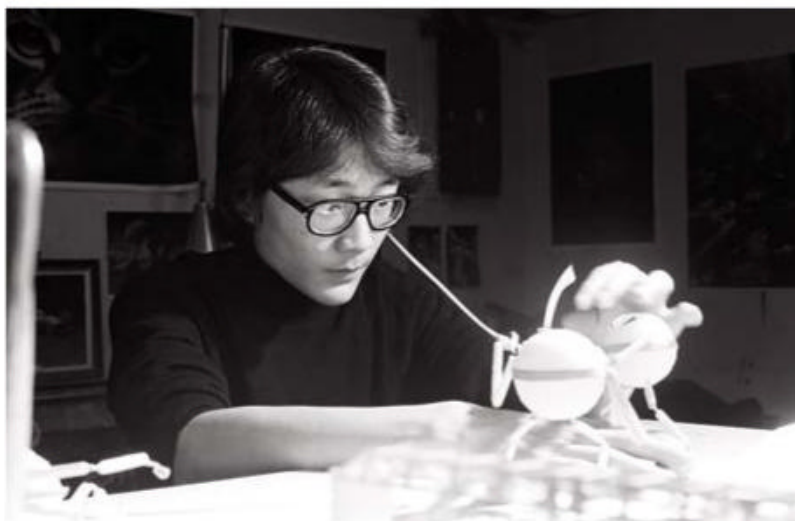
Trips to the library introduced the young Chiang to the specifics of Harryhausen's technique, and inspired him to devise and make his own movies with his Super-8 film camera. "That became the foundation of my education as I started to make little short films," he explains. "I spent a lot of my weekends during the summer animating them and discovering how to tell stories. They involved various disciplines, because I had to storyboard, design sets, build them, and light and film them."

The year after he saw *A New Hope*, Chiang watched *The Making of Star Wars TV*

01



02



01 An acrylic painting of a futuristic car concept by Chiang (1990).

03 Young Doug Chiang animating stop-motion puppets for a short film (1978).

03 A concept sketch for *The Phantom Menace*, made using gray markers and pen, Chiang's signature style (1997).

documentary, which further opened his eyes. "I saw people doing things that I wanted to do, and it really made me realize, 'OK, this could be a possible career path. This is something that I really want to pursue.'"

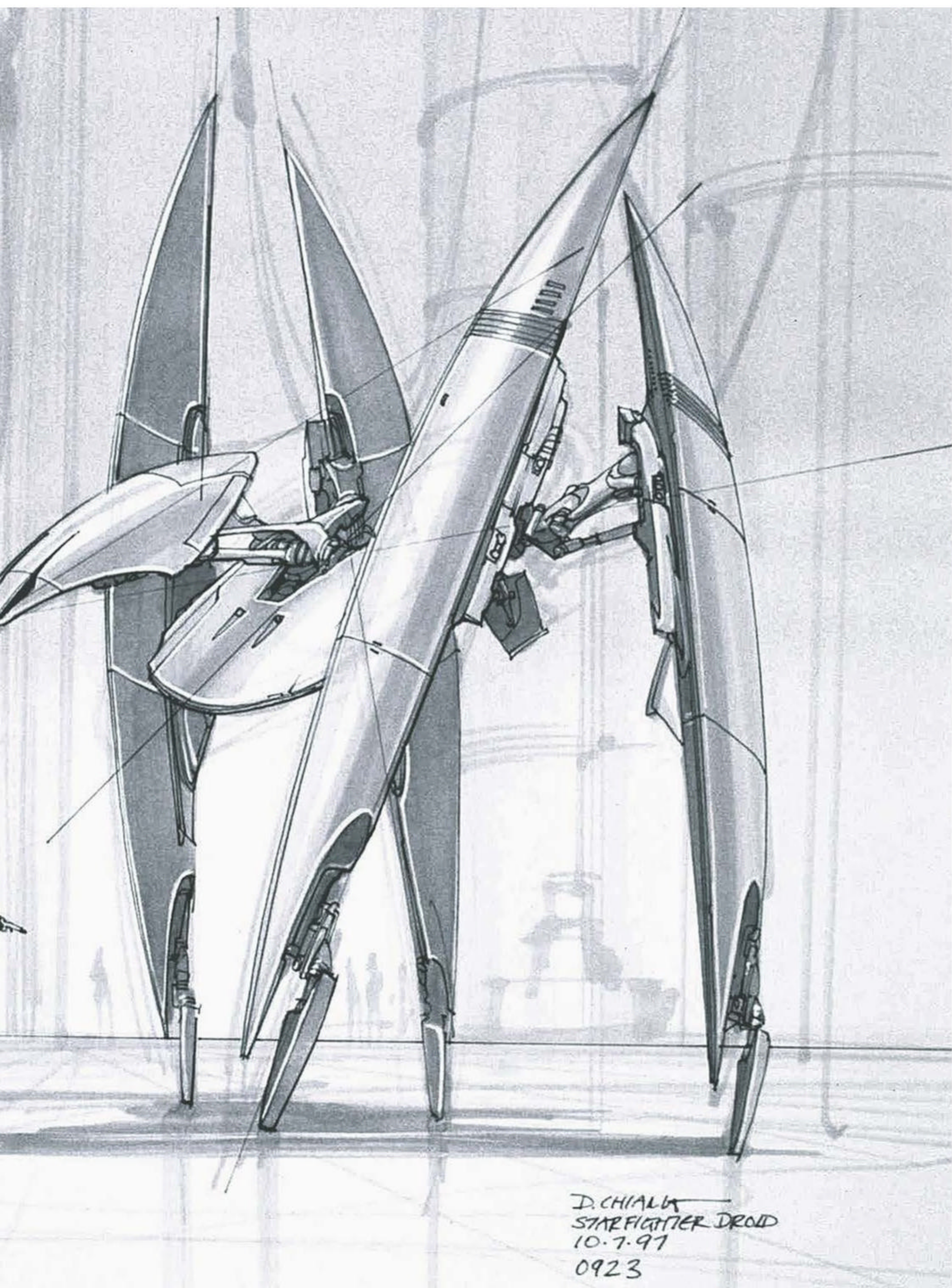
Already an avid reader, Chiang became devoted to the science-fiction film magazine, *Starlog*. "That magazine became my bible for filmmaking," he recalls. "It helped me to figure out that there are people I could follow who were doing things like that."

One of those people was illustrator and concept artist, Ralph McQuarrie, whom Chiang still speaks of with awe. "I saw his artwork in the *Making of* books, the *Art of* books, his *Star Wars* portfolio," he says. "I started to learn how to paint and design by studying McQuarrie's paintings, and then learned how to draw and sketch with markers by looking at Joe Johnston's drawings. Copying their technique really gave me an avenue to pursue what I really wanted to do." ►

"I REMEMBER BEING ENAMORED BY THE IDEA OF CREATING CHARACTERS AND WORLDS. SO, A LOT OF MY DRAWINGS WERE ABOUT CREATING STORIES AND ILLUSTRATING THEM."

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D. CHIALUX
STARFIGHTER DROID
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► NEW WORLD VIEW

Yet Chiang's dream was abruptly sidelined by a serious illness in his late teens. "I spent almost a year in the hospital," explains the artist. "When I recovered, my whole world view changed and everything became more serious. I don't know if that was a good thing or bad, because prior to that, I was freeform. My creativity seemed boundless because I did not know that there were any limits. Suddenly I had this limit, and I felt like time was really precious. I decided that I had to be clear about what I wanted to do, and that's when I decided on filmmaking. I didn't know how to get there, but that was what I wanted." He researched colleges and discovered either NYU or UCLA was where he needed to be. "I was kind of tired of the cold weather in Michigan," he smiles. "So, I came out to the West Coast."

Chiang was accepted to The UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television to study film. "The irony was that I got into the industry through my art, not through my film knowledge," he laughs. "But what it gave me was the ability to design better for cinema, in terms of knowing how to compose for shots, and how to move the camera through scenes."

"I did miss out in not going through the art school program, in terms of learning proper techniques," he continues. "But fortunately, I had always drawn, and so I was able to work on my drawing skills until I was good enough to freelance."

Chiang's first full-time job came out of his illustration work

04



for the UCLA student newspaper, the *Daily Bruin*. "Eventually I became the creative director for the newspaper, which involved me doing a lot of pen and ink illustrations for news and features stories," he says. "It was through the newspaper that I was then given a lead for this computer-graphics company called Digital Productions."

"At that time it was one of three major computer-graphics companies designing motion logos and movie titles. They were best known for doing the digital effects for *The Last Starfighter*

04 Luke's lightsaber finds its way into Doug Chiang's personal 1990 holiday card, painted in acrylic.

05 Chiang's production painting of Naboo starfighters in flight.

06 A stealth plane concept, created during Chiang's "year of homework" project (1990). project.

07 Chiang shows his mentor Ralph McQuarrie the Jedi starfighter concept model.

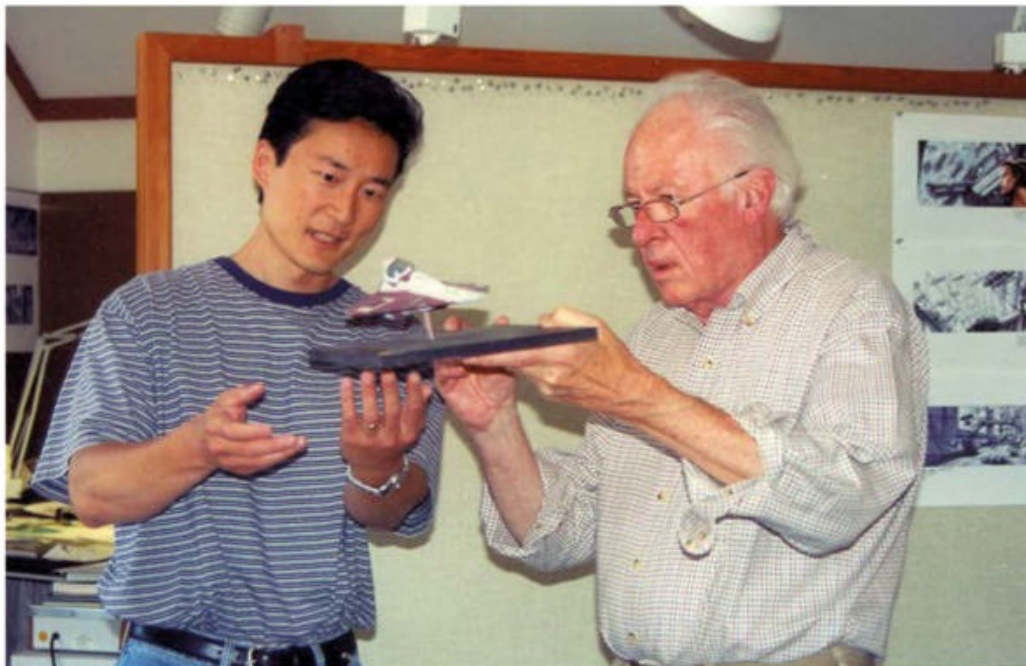
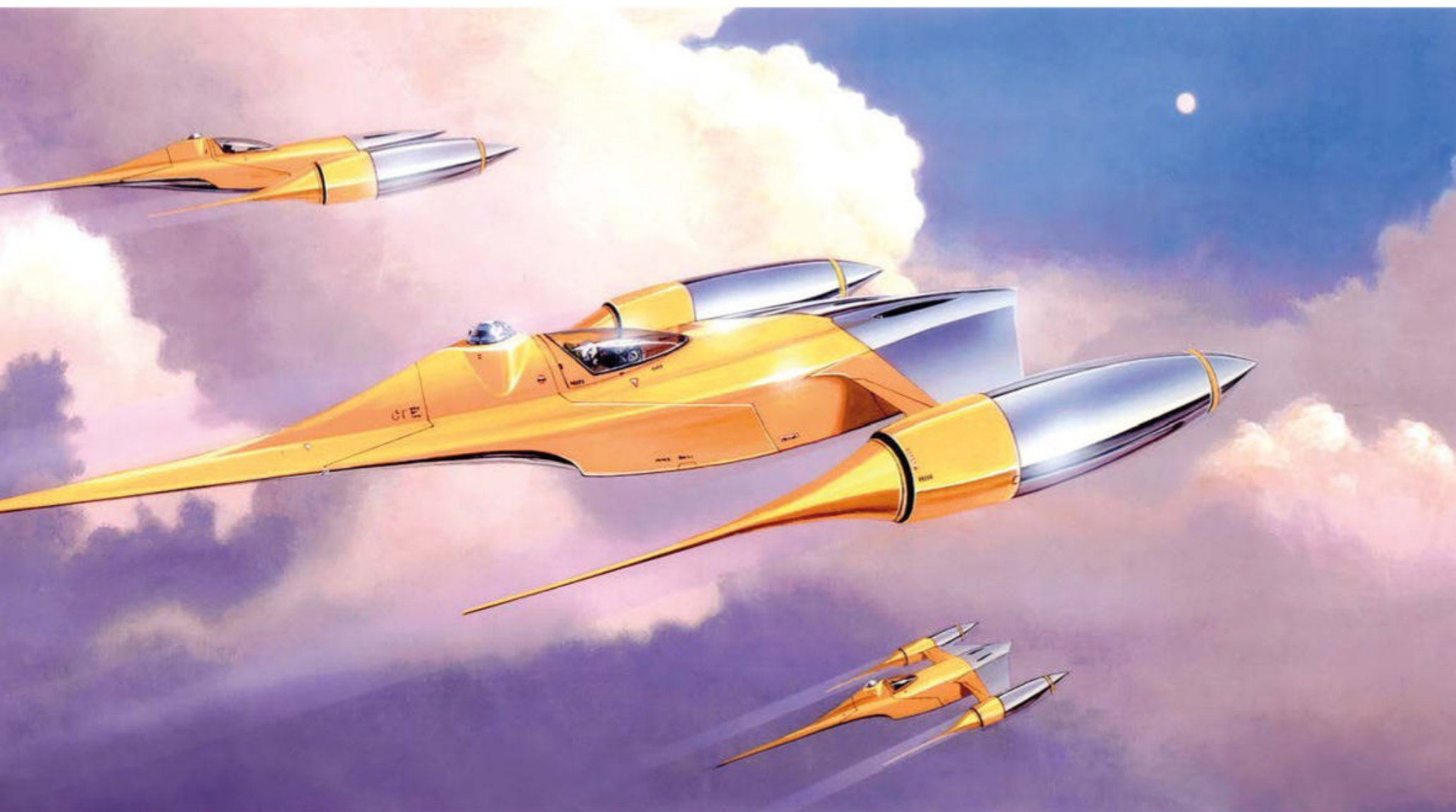
(1984). I knew roughly of their work, having seen the film, and they offered me a job to become a commercial designer and director for computer-generated television commercials."

It was Chiang's big break, but, he admits with a chuckle: "I did not have *any* clue how to design for commercials! But it was really great to be in that environment, because I met a lot of really strong artists and I had a chance to learn art on the job. That was one of my first introductions and where I really got to understand how you do proper storyboards. How you paint them, how you interact with clients, how you sell your idea."

With those skills learned, Chiang looked for an actual job in the film industry and landed a prop designer position on *Back to the Future II*. "I'd heard they were looking for artists, and I submitted my portfolio. One of the wonderful things



"I STARTED TO LEARN HOW TO PAINT AND DESIGN BY STUDYING MCQUARRIE'S PAINTINGS, AND THEN LEARNED HOW TO DRAW AND SKETCH WITH MARKERS BY LOOKING AT JOE JOHNSTON'S DRAWINGS."



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about the film industry is that it's really all about your portfolio, not your resumé, or how many films you've worked on. If you have the skills and are willing to work hard, you'll get the job. So, I was fortunate enough that Rick Carter, the production designer, gave me an opportunity to come into the art department to design, and that became my second "professional" art school. I was in a room with a half a dozen artists, and they were all some of the industry's best."

Chiang says this concentrated period was crucial

in developing his skills and point of view. "Being in that environment, where everybody was so open and sharing with their techniques, I really blossomed in terms of my art skills. And I was also the new kid so I felt very inadequate and could barely keep up. It was like an intensive three or four months of design school, but it

was so wonderful to be in that environment and get a taste of what real film design is all about.

"The nice thing about being in that environment—where all the artists had very distinct styles and techniques—was that I could cherry pick techniques and adapt them for myself. I really liked that kind of environment because I literally could go, 'Oh, I love

► how you're designing and using that tool. I'd like to try that.' And then I could go to another artist and study what they were doing and I could merge the two techniques. It became this slow, organic process where I started to discover my style."

It was in this period that Chiang discovered his love for the marker-rendering style of drawing. "I really gravitated towards it, and I still use it now," he says. "It's freeform sketching with a broad, 30-percent gray marker. Even though markers aren't supposed to be used as an initial sketching tool, I really like it because of the happy accidents you get from using it on Xerox paper, and how it bleeds and blends."

With his techniques expanding, Chiang utilised them to create works that drew from his influences and created a unique style of his own. "I've always loved wildlife art, and Western paintings, and landscapes in general, but then I also love science-fiction and other worlds," he explains. "I started to combine those, so a lot of my personal pieces at that time blended two or three genres. I loved it because it was actually twisting what you're familiar with into something very fresh, and a lot of what we do in the film industry is that kind of thinking. I didn't know it at that time, but that was where I was going with my personal style."

THREE WEEKS PLUS

About a year later, a former colleague from Digital Productions, Steve Beck, called Chiang from his new art department job at Industrial Light & Magic in Northern California. "He called me and said, 'Hey, I have a three-week project for a film that we're bidding on. Would you like to do it?'"

"Now, the whole reason I moved out to the West Coast was to eventually make my way to Industrial Light & Magic," Chiang grins. "So, even though it was only a three-week project, I dropped everything. I packed up and moved up to Marin County, in the

"THE WHOLE REASON I MOVED OUT TO THE WEST COAST WAS TO EVENTUALLY MAKE MY WAY TO INDUSTRIAL LIGHT & MAGIC."

08 Chiang with Ralph McQuarrie and Ray Harryhausen at George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch.

09 A digital production painting of desert cargo transports from 2010.

10 Chiang honed his skills during 1990 with weekly personal assignments.

11 Another personal project.

12 A worker-robot concept (Marker and pen, 2006).

hopes that this would be my ticket into ILM." He admits it was a huge gamble, but it paid off when he was then hired as ILM's Visual Effects Art Director.

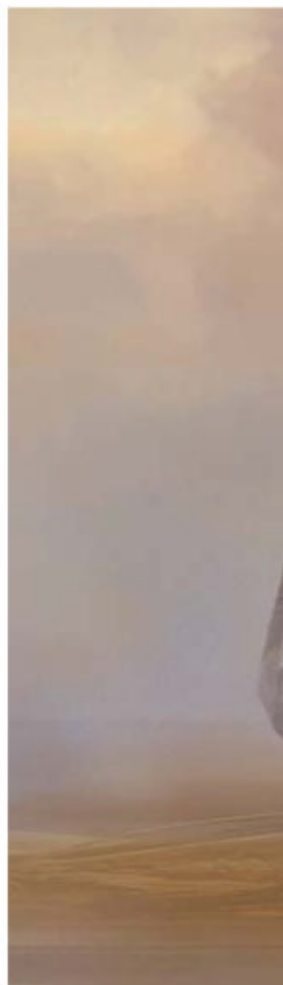
Chiang remembers his first day at the ILM offices as a surreal experience. "I was walking down the hall and seeing people that I saw in *The Making of Star Wars* when I was a kid," he recalls with genuine awe. "People like Steve Gawley, Dennis Muren... Icons of the industry! And here I was at the same company, in the same building. It was mind-blowing. The small art department was made up of some of the industry's best talents. I knew they were the best of the best, and I just felt so thankful to be among them. But I also felt so inadequate, in terms of having so much to learn."

While others might have cracked under the pressure of working with such industry giants, Chiang was made of sterner stuff. "The fear really motivated me," he insists. "Once I got in there, and I was doing visual-effects design for films, I knew that I had to up my game. I had to improve my skills because the job really demanded that, and I really wanted to feel like I belonged there."

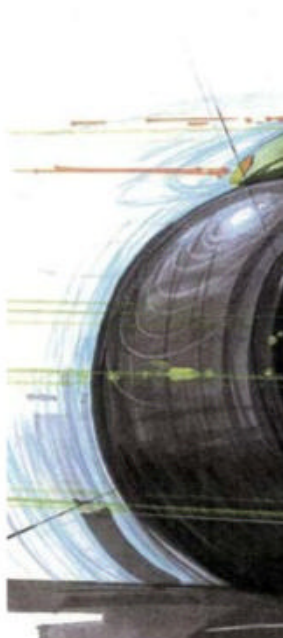
Chiang's solution was to do even more work in his spare time. "I set a goal that for one year I would do personal projects and paintings," he reveals. "Every week, I would give myself an assignment that I would realize on the weekends and turn into a final production painting. I would do that every week for a year. It could be any subject matter, and I really pushed



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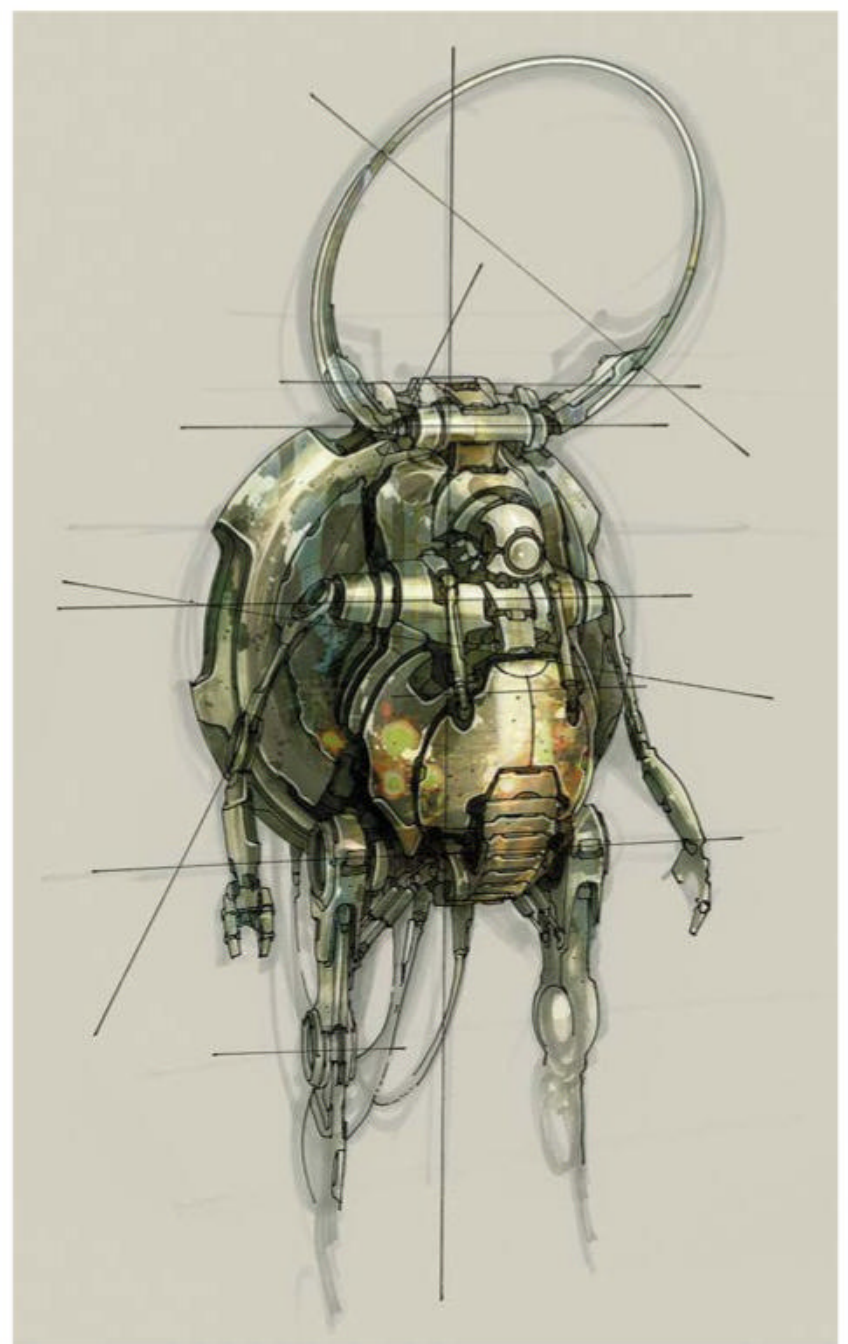
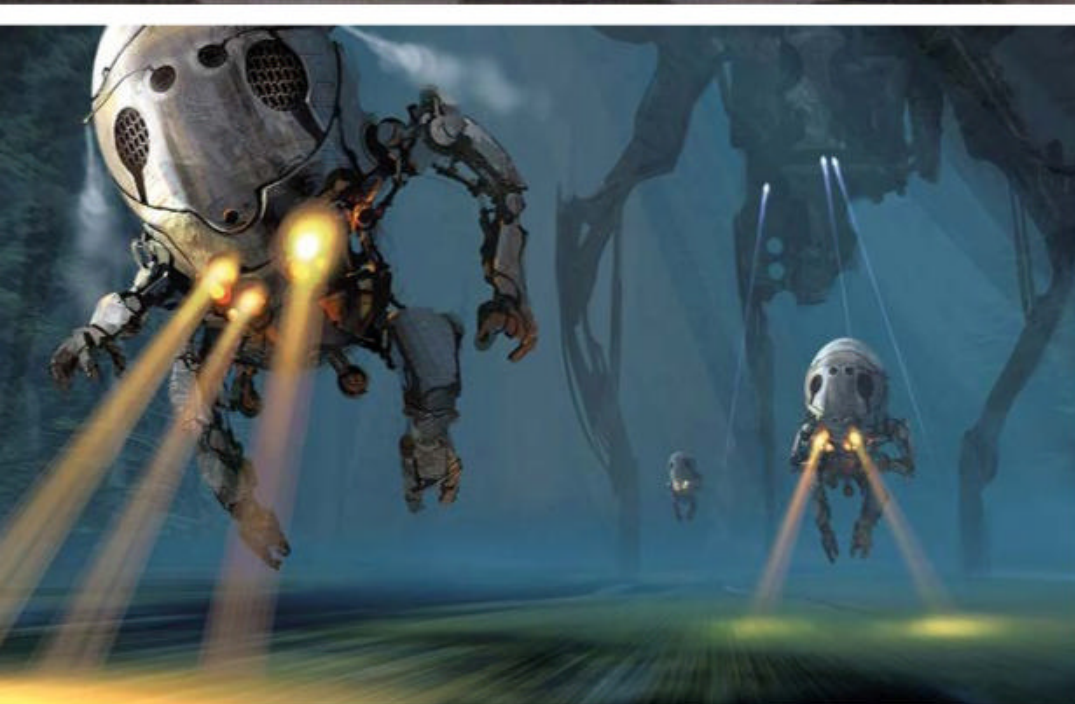
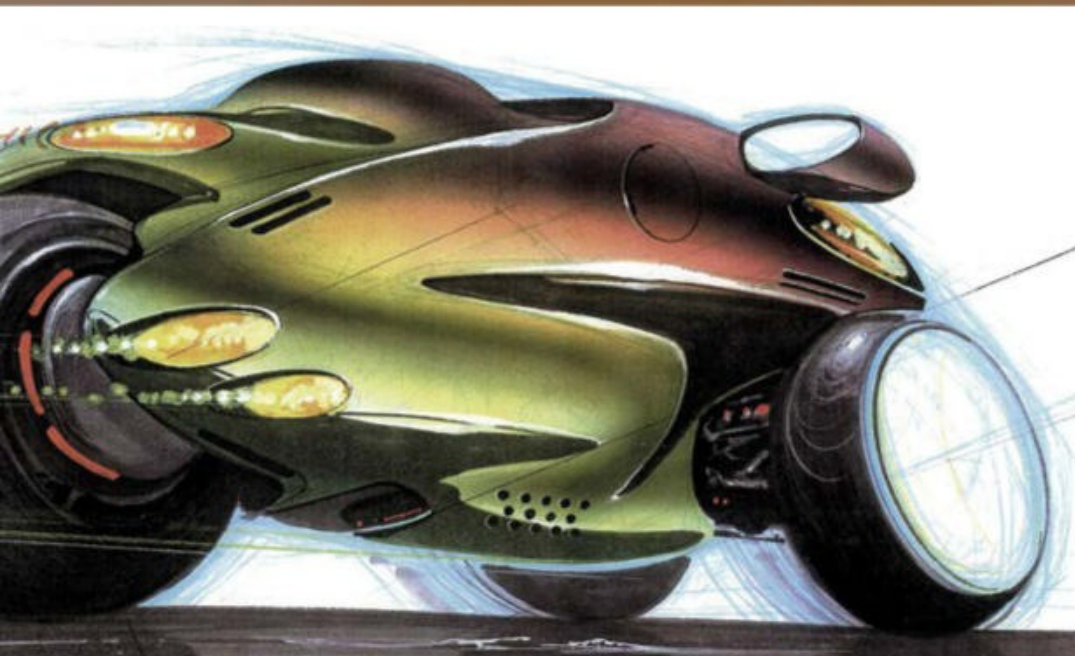


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► myself and went into areas that I was uncomfortable with—things like character design, costume design, and painting. It was really hard, but I felt it was really important to do. And, the great thing is, after that year, I saw a noticeable improvement in my skills, and I had amassed a really diverse portfolio that was distinctly me.”

During his day job, Chiang worked as the VFX art director on seminal films such as *Ghost* (1990), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Death Becomes Her*

13 An acrylic production painting of the Gungan army for *The Phantom Menace*.

14 A digital concept painting of a spaceship transport, circa 2011.

“WHEN I ARRIVED AT ILM IN 1989, IT WAS RUMORED GEORGE LUCAS WAS NEVER GOING TO MAKE ANOTHER *STAR WARS* MOVIE, SO I PUT THAT DREAM ASIDE.”

(1992), *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *The Mask* (1994). For *Death Becomes Her*, he won the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects and began a long collaborative relationship with director Robert Zemeckis.

But most importantly, Chiang states, he found his style during that period, which made him a candidate for his dream job: working on a *Star Wars* movie.

“When I arrived at ILM in 1989, it was rumored George Lucas was never going to make another *Star Wars* movie,” he remembers. “So, I just put that dream aside, and then went into visual-effects designs. Eventually George announced he was going to create new films, and by then I had a portfolio!”

Seeking an artistic collaborator to craft the look of the *Star Wars* prequels and work side-by-side

with the writer-director, Lucas announced the new position of head of the Lucasfilm art department. Chiang applied for the job and landed it.

“Doing that homework for a year really paid off,” Chiang says with pride, “because what I was doing on my own—merging genres and combining old and new—was exactly what George was doing with *Star Wars*. He saw something in my portfolio, and that’s how I got the job. If I hadn’t gone through that painful year of learning on my own, I wouldn’t be where I am today!”

In the next part of the interview, Doug Chiang talks about working with George Lucas, the lessons he learned about design and the Star Wars signature style, and the challenges of shaping the future of the universe.



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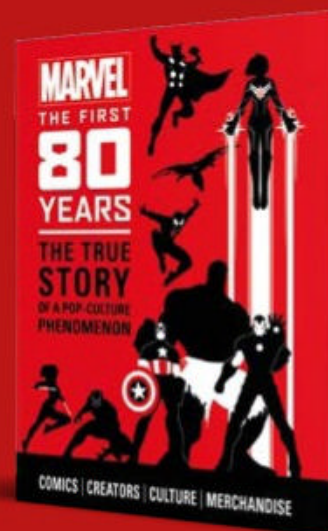
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Doug Chiang

Reinventing Galaxies

In the second part of *Insider's* exclusive interview with Lucasfilm's vice president and executive creative director, Doug Chiang talks about working with George Lucas and pushing the boundaries of *Star Wars* design.

WORDS: TARA BENNETT

W

hen Doug Chiang was made head of Lucasfilm's art department in 1995, he realized that he had landed the job of a lifetime. As a *Star Wars* fan since 1977, Chiang had long hoped to work for the studio that had

made cinema's most famous trilogy, but had never dreamed that he might be doing so just as work was beginning on a whole new series of *Star Wars* films. Hand-picked by George Lucas on the strength of his portfolio, he found himself working closely with the



great man himself—and admits it was more than a little daunting.

“Here was my idol, the person who had influenced my whole career,” he explains. “George had seen my portfolio, liked it, and had the confidence in me that I could live up to the legacy of Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston. I had always dreamt of that, but to have it

become a reality... I really had to prove myself! And that was the most frightening part. As an artist there’s a part of me that is insecure, and I kept thinking ‘Can I really do this? Did they make a mistake?’”

Chiang’s first day working on the prequel trilogy was January 19, 1995, at Skywalker Ranch in Marin County, California. Chiang

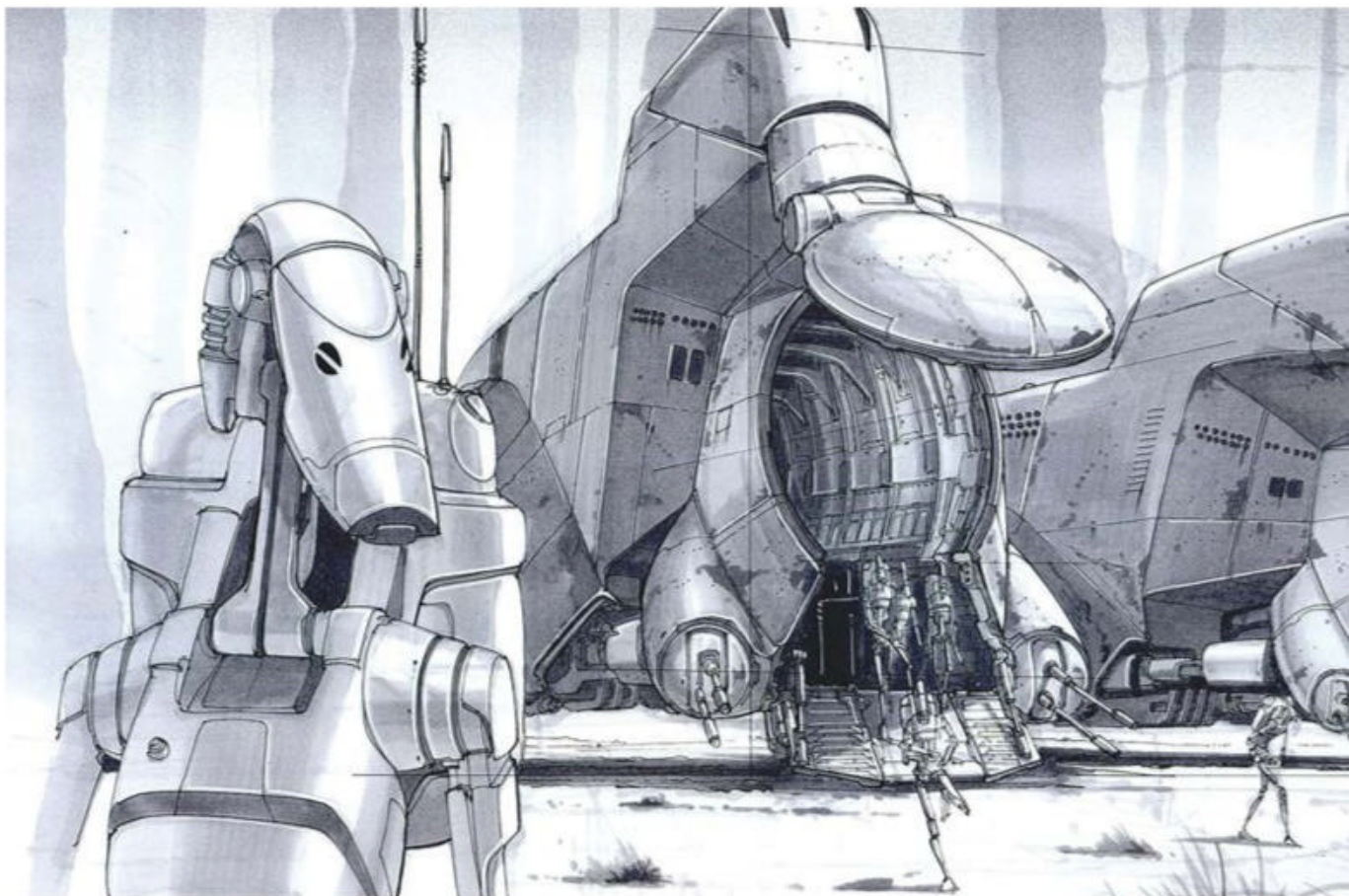
and illustrator/creature designer Terryl Whitlatch were the only two in-house artists at that point. “I don’t know about Terryl, but I felt this tremendous weight on my shoulders,” he recalls. “It was a really terrifying time! During our first meeting, George had basically said: ‘Forget everything you know of what *Star Wars* is, because we’re going to start over.’ That really frightened me, because prior to that my vision of *Star Wars* was what George had already done. But what he wanted to do was step back a little bit and figure out what the design philosophy for *Star Wars* really was. ►

► He was wonderful to work with. He is very supportive, and he loves working with artists.” In hindsight, Chiang says that this approach was exactly what he needed to follow in order to understand what Lucas wanted from the prequel trilogy. “I knew that the look was going to be slightly different, but the process of how to design for *Star Wars*, and what makes a *Star Wars* design, still had to be exactly right,” he explains. “And I really learned that by hearing it directly from George. During that first year, we established the entire design history of the *Star Wars* universe, which now anchors everything we do, from the prequels to the new movies. I was really fortunate to have the opportunity to help George discover and establish that design foundation.

Un-Designed

“One of the biggest lessons I learned from George,” Chiang continues, “was that he never really considered *Star Wars* to be a science-fiction genre movie. He thought of it as a historical, documentary drama. It was an interesting way to look at it, because he wanted to create designs that disappeared into the background, and he didn’t want to create things that drew attention to themselves; he wanted sets that the audience wouldn’t remember afterwards. They should remember that the

01



01 A Doug Chiang concept sketch for *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*.

02 Doug Chiang at Skywalker Ranch.

03 Battle droids ride STAPs, in this concept painting (top right).

04 “Olm Hunter” painting from *Robota* by Doug Chiang (opposite page).

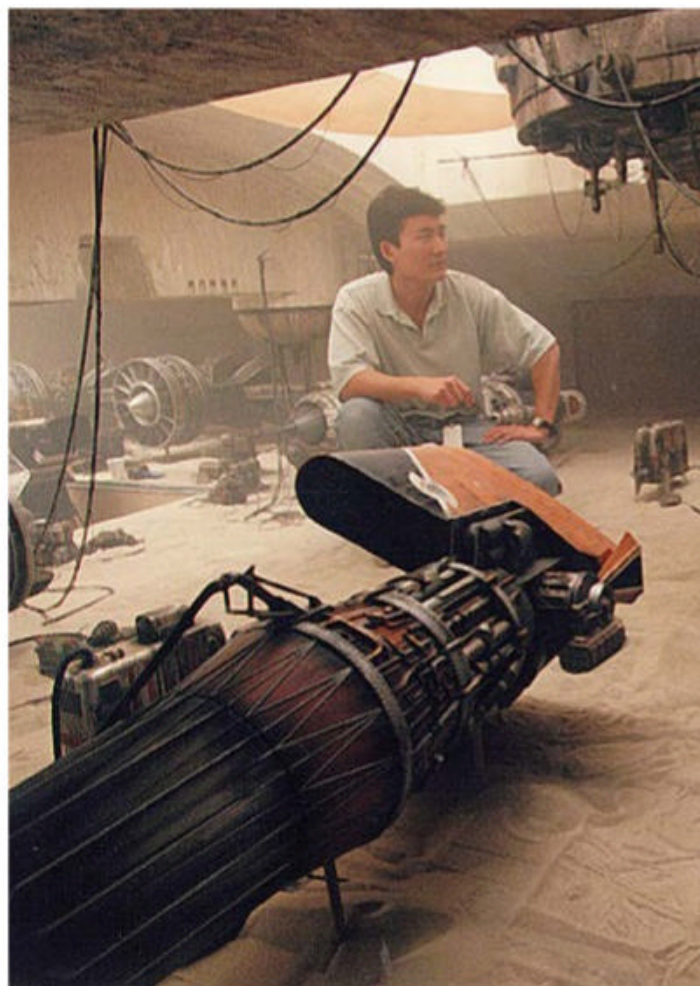
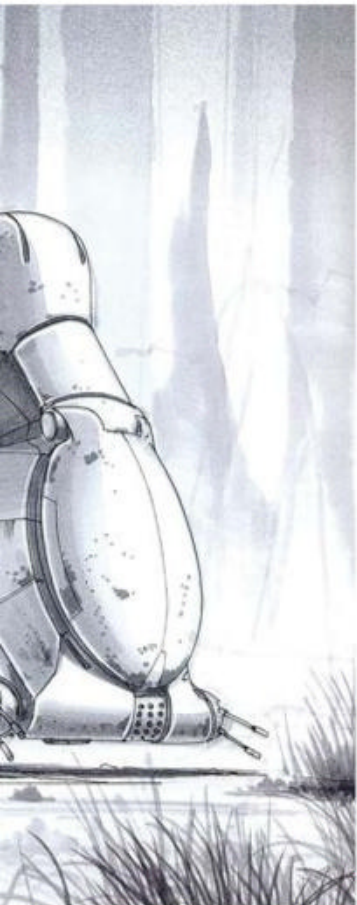
“GEORGE HAD BASICALLY SAID: ‘FORGET EVERYTHING YOU KNOW OF WHAT *STAR WARS* IS, BECAUSE WE’RE GOING TO START OVER.’”

sets were authentic, and they looked real, and that they helped tell the story, but not the specific, otherworldly details.” With that in mind, a big part of Chiang’s job became making sure that his designs didn’t look ‘designed’ at all. “George’s big critique of science-fiction at the time was that it was always very carefully art directed. He said: ‘If you show me a set from any of those films, it looks like somebody *designed* it. It doesn’t look like real life.’ He wanted to go the opposite way, so I tried to make everything very eclectic. Real life is a collection of things that you gather over many years. Furniture doesn’t match, paint doesn’t match, lighting doesn’t match. But it all informs who the characters are. When you look at the interior of the *Millennium Falcon*, for example, you can see Han’s personality in it, not the vision of an art director.”

That believably haphazard eclecticism has been part of *Star Wars* since the beginning, but has often been attributed to budgets and schedules as much as a deliberate aesthetic, but Chiang maintains that it was always a bold tactic on the part of Lucas. “George always loved to take risks,” he says, “and I found that really wonderful. If you look at Jabba’s sail barge in *Return of the Jedi*, it has a totally different aesthetic from anything that’s been seen before, but it works. It’s still totally *Star Wars*, you know? But, if someone was looking at *A New Hope* on its own, they would never think to design Jabba’s barge like that for *Return of the Jedi*. The pirate-like sail barge visually reinforces Jabba’s criminal character and gives him more depth. George was bold enough to do that, and that is where I really appreciate the genius of what he has done.

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HEROES

"I always looked up to Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston," says Chiang. "They were always at the pinnacle of who I aspired to be in terms of an artistic film designer. During my first year at ILM, Joe Johnston was working with Spielberg on *Always* (1989) and he was often in his office doing storyboards. I was afraid to bug him, but I would sneak in when he wasn't there and look at all of his storyboards, which he would always pin up on the wall. It was just great to see him work. I was too afraid to really engage in any serious conversation with him, but it was great!"

"When I started working on *Star Wars* in 1995, I finally got to meet Ralph McQuarrie, and that was really amazing. I actually got to know him pretty well, and spent quite a bit of time with him, really picking his brain. He was such a nurturing, mentoring artist, and so generous with his time. It was so great to hear his stories about how he started out, how he started working with George, and how he designed certain things. Through that, my admiration for him grew even further. For me, he is the *Star Wars* aesthetic. And to really get to know him—to understand how he thought and how he approached design—was really incredible."

"Ralph's thumbnail sketches were most impressive for me, because there is an economy of design that is so efficient. He could convey so much with so little. That's something that I think is lost on a lot of younger artists now. At first glance you can say, 'Oh, that's easy.' But, finding that clarity is so hard. He just makes it look simple. It's something that I keep chasing, even today. So much of what he did, including non-*Star Wars* projects, is just so strong."

He has created this thing that's really broad and different, but where everything makes sense and all fits together. There's a lot of homework that goes into that, which people sometimes overlook. To take the ordinary and turn it into something so extraordinary. That's a talent

05 Supervising the detailing of a life-sized battle droid prop.

06 Chiang on the miniature pod racer hangar set.

that I really admire, and I still try to emulate it today." In 2002, Chiang left Lucasfilm to launch his own venture, the boutique design firm IceBlink Studios, which contributed to blockbuster movies such as Robert Zemeckis' *The Polar Express* (2004) and Steven

Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005). Then, in 2007, he joined Zemeckis' new joint venture with Disney, ImageMovers Digital, and worked on the pioneering motion-capture movies *Mars Needs Moms* (2011) and *A Christmas Carol* (2009). At the same time, he was also

▶ working on his own passion projects, including the illustrated novel *Robota*, and *Mechanika*, a how-to book for budding sci-fi artists.

"I like to do my own projects," Chiang explains. "*Robota* actually came about when I was working with George. I needed another outlet, I wanted to improve my skills and challenge myself even further. Not that my day job wasn't challenging enough," he clarifies. "But *Robota* allowed me to go in a different direction. The idea was something that I was always kind of thinking about, ever since I was a kid. In some ways, it was a project that instigated my whole portfolio and got me the job on *Star Wars*, combining old and new technology with Western art."

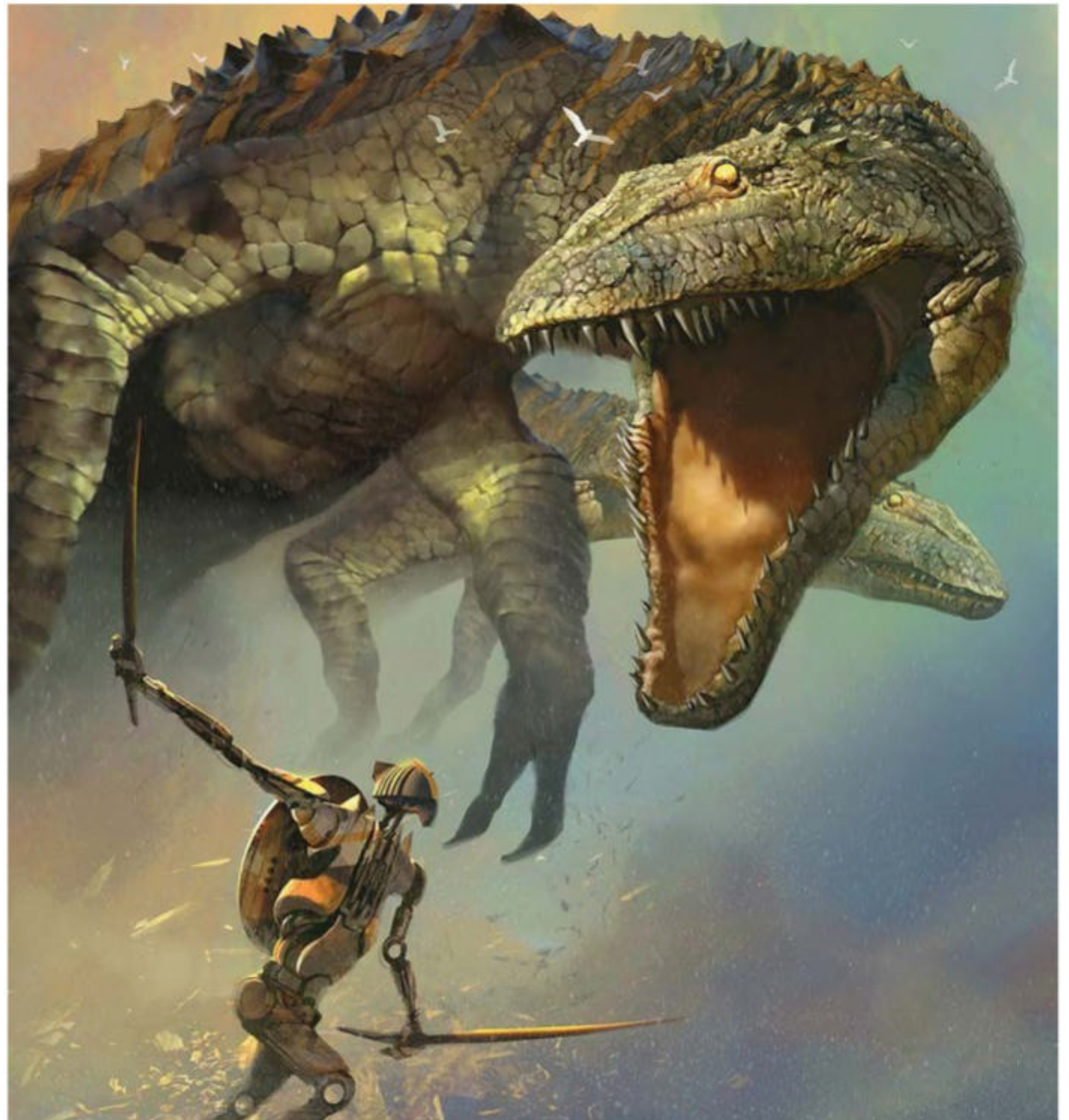
Return to the fold

Today, *Star Wars* is back at the forefront of Chiang's attention. After spending 11 years away from Lucasfilm, he returned to the fold in 2013, when he accepted the position of vice president and executive creative director.

"My role now is to help oversee all the *Star Wars* designs for all of our franchise projects, including the theme parks," he says. "It's a fantastic job and I wouldn't trade it for anything, but it can be hard work, too. There are usually three to five projects on the go at any time, and different filmmakers have their own very specific points of view about how they want things to be. My job is to help guide those visions, whether that means art directing other designers, or contributing art myself, working on several projects at once."

"IT REALLY EMPOWERS ME TO KNOW THAT I'M 56 AND I CAN STILL LEARN NEW THINGS, STILL WORK WITH THE COOLEST PEOPLE, AND HOPEFULLY NEXT YEAR DO IT ALL AGAIN."

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Those projects have included the latest big-screen installments of the Skywalker Saga, and the standalone *Star Wars Story* films. Right now, Chiang's day-to-day is largely concerned with the as-yet-untitled Episode IX. "We are currently in a heavy design period for Episode IX," he says. "So I'm busy overseeing other artists and helping to guide the team, and managing all the other projects, while still finding time to contribute some actual artwork. It's a really rich environment to be in, and every

07 Art from Chiang's *Robota* (Digital).

08 "Jodphur Warriors" from *Robota* by Doug Chiang (acrylic).

09 Chiang at Pinewood Studios during *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*.

10 "Desert Derelict" from *Robota* by Doug Chiang (acrylic).

day is different because things change very quickly in terms of story or the demands of the direction. It's a unique role." And with Lucas no longer driving the look of the *Star Wars* world, Chiang is a unique resource for his fellow designers, too, able to offer authentic advice about how 'George might have done it.' "I do my best to fulfill that role," Chiang demurs, "but there's only one George Lucas! Now, instead of George we have a collection of people, myself included, and the Story Group, who use our knowledge of the *Star Wars* universe to see just how much we can break the rules and push the envelope. "The new filmmakers are very much like myself, in that we all grew up with the original trilogy and we are all huge *Star Wars*



10

fans. I help them to push the boundaries without contradicting what has gone before in the *Star Wars* universe. What we come up with may not be exactly what they asked for or were expecting, but we come up with ways to fit the story they want to tell. We all want to try to make our best version of *Star Wars* with respect to George, while also taking that legacy to the next level."

Reflecting on his return to Lucasfilm after more than a decade away, Chiang admits that it was quite "frightening" at first. "I was coming back into an environment where I was adamant that I wanted to be just an artist. I wanted to draw and design things myself," he explains. "But I was so rusty!"

"After working more than 10 years as a production designer where I was mostly supervising other artists, I remember coming back as an artist and realizing that I had to relearn skills, and actually learn new techniques. I always want to be a better artist than I was last year, and I really pushed myself

to learn 3D software. It was really hard, but I knew I had to do it. For the first three months, I would design during the day, doing my best to keep up with the other artists. At night I would learn 3D software on my own. I'm really glad I did, because it's a very effective tool. Improving my skills is one of the things that drives me, and is why I do a lot of homework on my own. I am still adamant now about being an artist. Even though I'm overseeing multiple projects, I always try to carve out time to actually do designs, because I think it's so important. It's a part of me that I don't want to lose, and now that I've learned some new tools and techniques, it's such a fun thing to do. I wish I had more time, but everybody says that, don't they?"

Now 30 years into his career, Chiang looks back on all the opportunities, successes, and occasional stumbles that have led him back to Lucasfilm with nothing but utter gratitude. All of those experiences have made him the creator that he is today, working in a world that first sparked his imagination

as a teenager in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan.

"I love what I do," he grins with unabashed enthusiasm. "I love working with the people that I'm working with, and I love the projects. Even with all the pressures of production, it's totally worth it. But the funny thing is—and I think this is true of a lot of artists—what drives me is the fear factor. Every time a new project comes along, I ask myself: Can you still do this?"

"In this industry, we're all judged by our last work. So even though someone on the outside might say, 'Hey Doug, you've accomplished quite a bit,' I will always worry that next week, if I can't do it, I'm out. That's what motivates me to stay on top of it. When you can't do that anymore, it's time to move aside—and I do not want to do that yet! I want to keep this going for as long as I can, always getting better as an artist and as a designer. It really empowers me to know that I'm 56 and I can still learn new things, still work with the coolest people, and hopefully next year do it all again. It's just such a great feeling." 🙌



Grand Admiral Thrawn is a skilled tactician who debuted in Season Three of *Rebels*.

ANIMATING THE ADMIRAL

Keith Kellogg, animation supervisor for *Star Wars Rebels*, talks about transforming Legends icon Grand Admiral Thrawn from prose protagonist to 3D threat!

INTERVIEW BY TRICIA BARR

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Keith Kellogg's key role as animation supervisor on the *Star Wars* franchise began on *Star Wars:*

The Clone Wars with the Season Four premiere, "Water War." He has worked on every episode of *Star Wars Rebels* to date.

> On animating Admiral Thrawn...

First, we receive a design from our amazing art director Killian Plunkett and his team, and then we create a model, based on what we're given, in a 3D software program called Maya. Our character technical directors then create what is called a "rig" for the model, basically a virtual skeleton complete with bones and joints, which can be manipulated. The "rig" is then passed to our animators, who can then pose the character, like moving the arms and legs and creating facial expressions, to suit the needs of the action.

> On what Thrawn means to him...

I read Timothy Zahn's original Thrawn trilogy when I was growing up, and I know how much the character means to the *Star Wars* community, so it was humbling and exciting to bring such an icon into the animation realm. We were all aware of the significance.

> On setting Thrawn apart from other bad guys...

When we found out Lars Mikkelsen was providing the voice, and got to hear him for the first time speaking as Thrawn, we knew he would be a very calculating villain and very intelligent—not at all typical, and certainly not over-the-top. With that in mind, we knew that when animating him his movements would need to be toned down, too, more so than most of the characters in *Rebels*. For example, we gave him

"IT CAN BE HARD TO FIND SPOTS WHERE HIS CHARACTER COMES ACROSS TO THE AUDIENCE, WITHOUT HIM BEING OVER THE TOP."

very little movement in his brow, and even less movement in his mouth. His changes in expression, when they happen, are also very deliberate and toned down as well.

> On meeting Timothy Zahn...

[*Rebels* executive producer] Dave Filoni is very open when it comes to creators, so he had Timothy come down to see us. We told him what we were doing with Thrawn, and got his feedback. He really liked it, which was good to know, because we spent a lot of time trying to figure out how we would portray him, based on what we knew from Timothy's books.

> On Thrawn's body language...

One of the great insights Timothy Zahn gave us was that Thrawn is always trying to fit in. His blue skin makes him stand out, certainly, but he does things to emulate humans, whether that is putting his arm on his elbow or putting his hands behind his back. Thrawn is always thinking about how he can look as normal as possible and to not stand out more than he already does.

> On the challenges of Thrawn...

Because he doesn't emote using big facial expressions and often keeps his hands behind his back, it can be hard to find spots where

his character comes across to the audience, without him being over the top. One of the ways we can show who he is as a character is by placing him in his office, and then positioning him around or near the things he has collected. You will notice he is often framed by his two lizard statues. We try to play up the fact he is a historian and that he learns the motivations of his enemies based on their cultures, which ultimately comes back to the art he's collected.

> On his favorite Thrawn moment...

There's a scene in "Hera's Heroes" where Thrawn grabs Captain Slavin by the collar and hisses at him because Slavin didn't understand the historical significance of the Twi'lek Kalikori. Thrawn loses his composure for a split second, realizes what he's doing, and then puts Slavin down. Next, Thrawn brushes off his shoulder and regains the control he so desperately tries to maintain at all time. I loved that scene because again it harkens back to Thrawn being a historian and valuing artifacts taken from his enemies. To Slavin, it was a simple bobble; but to Thrawn, the artifact represented knowledge. The moment caught Thrawn off guard and he went ballistic, which was a lot of fun to do. 🐉



MAKING PLANS

Long before the Special Editions, *A New Hope* and *Return of the Jedi* boasted cutting-edge computer graphics to show the 3D plans of the Death Star and other key schematics. These were augmented throughout the original trilogy by more traditional animations that blended seamlessly with the high-tech setting as on-screen displays and readouts. *Insider* salutes the artists responsible.

WORDS BY JON D. WITMER



For a story set a long time ago, the original *Star Wars* trilogy demanded an awful lot of futuristic thinking.

Much has been written about Industrial Light & Magic's wizardry with miniature photography and compositing, which pushed visual effects to heights not matched until the digital revolution of the late 1990s. But for all its cutting-edge analog credentials, *Star Wars* also stepped into the digital world from the very beginning—using advanced computer graphics as early as 1976.

For most of *A New Hope*, the visuals displayed on tactical readouts and the like were traditional effects, designed

to look digital, but in reality hand drawn and painted. But for the key scene in the Yavin 4 briefing room—where General Dodonna briefs the rebel pilots on the fatal flaw in the Death Star design—George Lucas was

determined that the graphics seen on Dodonna's big screen should be suitably state-of-the-art.

It fell to *Star Wars* sound designer Ben Burt and optical photographer Robert Blalack to find someone suitably versed in the then-obscure world of computer graphics to create the animated Death Star sequence, and they eventually fell upon Larry Cuba. A research associate in the Art Department at the University of Illinois in Chicago, Cuba's

many talents included creating computer-animated films in the Chemistry Department's Circle Graphics Habitat.

GONE TO GRASS

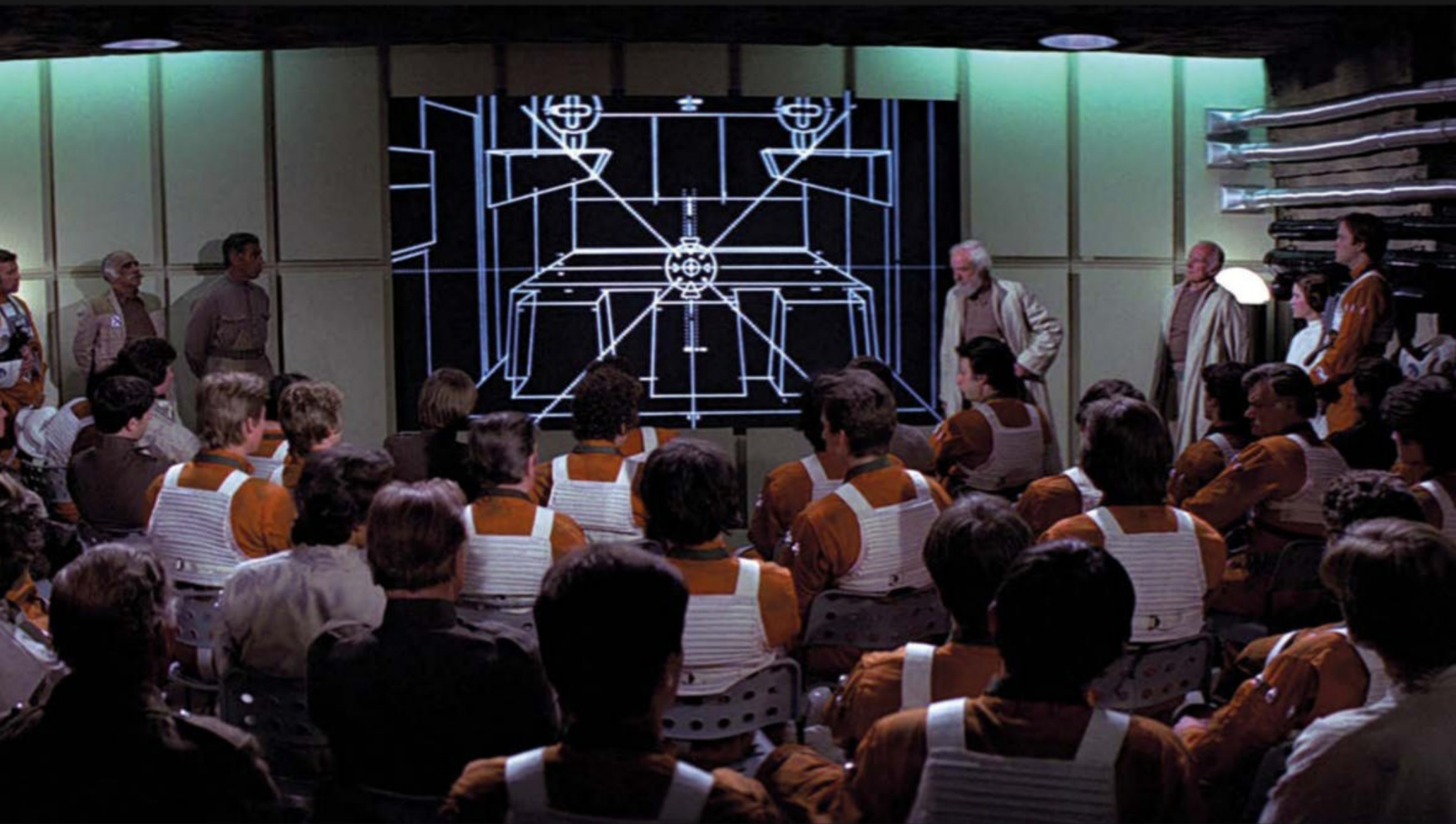
Cuba signed a contract to supply the Death Star graphics in February 1976 and, on the understanding that the finished animation would be ready for May, enlisted the aid of University of Illinois students including programmers T.J. O'Donnell and Tom Chomica in order to meet the deadline.

The key to realizing the sequence was GRASS—the Graphics Symbiosis System programming language developed by Thomas A. DeFanti in 1974. A relatively straightforward tool for animating 2D objects using scaling, rotation, and color changing, GRASS was augmented by Cuba to depict 3D objects.

"I visualized [the animation] as being one continuous shot,"

"CUBA SET ABOUT BUILDING HIS TRENCH ANIMATION BY 'TRACING' THE PHOTOGRAPHS GIVEN TO HIM BY BEN BURTT..."

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Cuba told J.W. Rinzler, as quoted in 2007's *The Making of Star Wars*. "Coming up on the Death Star, flying toward the surface, entering the trench, going straight down the trench, and dropping the bomb at the end into the target."

Cuba had three crucial references on which to base his animation: an early Ralph McQuarrie matte painting of the Death Star; photos of ILM's Death Star 40-foot-long trench model, supplied by Ben Burtt as it came together; and physical pieces from that same model.

Most usefully, McQuarrie's painting showed the station in its full, spherical glory, but notably located its superlaser dish on the equator line. This led to a discrepancy between Cuba's animation and the Death Star model seen in the film, as the decision to move the



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dish to the station's northern hemisphere came too late in the schedule to commission new computer graphics.

IN THE TRENCHES

Cuba set about building his trench animation by 'tracing' the photographs given to him by Ben Burtt into a PDP 11/45

01 General Dodonna briefs the Rebellion on Yavin 4.

02 The effects may have been in their infancy, but they remain ground-breaking.

minicomputer. The ILM trench model consisted of six pieces, and for each piece Cuba placed a photo on a data tablet, using a light pen and keyboard functions to plot its X, Y, and Z coordinates. This created a 3D wireframe model—viewable on a cathode-ray monitor—that Cuba could rotate. ▶

► Once the six basic trench pieces were saved in the computer's memory, Cuba used a separate program to combine them in U-shaped configurations to create the bottom and sides of a trench shape. The complete trench animation uses more than 50 of these U-shaped sections, and each frame of animation features four sections, combined and shown in perspective.

In order to transfer the finished animation onto film, Cuba pointed a Mitchell camera with a stop-motion animation motor at his monitor. The final animation was some 2,100 frames long, and each frame took two minutes to process, requiring more than 70 hours of stop-motion filming. The finished sequence was 90 seconds long, of which about 40 seconds appear in the movie.

BACK TO BASICS

Cuba delivered his animation on time, but that was not the end of the story. The final part of the sequence, showing a small ship delivering its payload into the Death Star reactor core, was actually a separate endeavor, created months later by another animator, John Wash.

“THE FINISHED SEQUENCE WAS 90 SECONDS LONG, OF WHICH ABOUT 40 SECONDS APPEAR IN THE MOVIE.”

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Wash had been hired to create postproduction display graphics alongside Jay Teitzell and Dan O'Bannon. ILM simply did not have the time to tackle everything in house, so the three men were assigned responsibility for around 10 displays, such as the readout on Luke Skywalker's macrobinoculars, the targeting displays in various ships, and the “floor-screen display” at the rebel base.

“All that stuff except for one shot was done using traditional backlit techniques,” says Wash today. “We used high-contrast black-and-white transparencies on either an Oxberry [animation stand]

or a small animation camera. By using different colored gels over the lens of the camera or the artwork, we could get a very rich degree of complexity by doing multiple passes.”

But while that technique worked well for most of the graphics, blowing up the Death Star was another matter entirely, owing to the scale limitations of the backlighting technology.

“When the graphic for the fighter comes in and drops the torpedo,” Wash explains, “the surface of the Death Star is just a straight line because we’re so close to it. But then we do a huge zoom back so the flat horizon starts to curve, and finally we see that it’s an orb. Then there’s a graphic of the torpedo exploding.

“The biggest piece of artwork I could get on an Oxberry was 30 inches, but if you backlight a 30-inch circle, you’re not going to be able to zoom in and get that flat line. For that, you need a circle that’s about 24-feet across! So we got a huge piece of aluminum and built a beam compass that was 12-feet long.

“I set it up on the floor of my apartment and used it to draw circular sections on about 72

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03 The targeting computer from Vader's TIE fighter was one of several interfaces designed (see opposite page).

04 A closer detail of the Death Star trench designed for the film using the GRASS system.

05 The Death Star moves steadily into range of Yavin 4.

animation cels, making each one slightly smaller than the last. That gave us a sequence that was maybe three seconds long, starting with something that looked essentially flat, and ending with a full 30-inch circle that I could match to a piece of artwork on the Oxberry with the Death Star totally in frame."

DEATH STAR DISPLAY

So, in fact, the climax of the groundbreaking Death Star computer graphics sequence isn't a computer graphic at all, but a traditional animation (albeit an ingenious one), designed to blend perfectly with the preceding visuals.

IN THE EDIT

Ultimately, the Computer Division's six effects for *Return of the Jedi* made their way to editor Duwayne Dunham, along with every other effect from the film—some 1,300 shots in total!

"On a daily basis, I would receive shots, cut them into the right sequence, and organize time so George Lucas could review each shot in its edited sequence," Dunham explains. "George would then give me specific comments about the effects shots: move this ship two fields north, move this one a field south; add this, take this away; that sort of thing. We called some shots 'CBB,' as in, 'Could Be Better.' Those were put on the backburner. If time permitted, we would go back to the CBBs."

"We created a standard form so we could track the status of each shot all the way through to the final, and I'd send the forms back over to ILM or whoever with George's notes. Toward the end I think I was being a little too harsh, even though I was just giving George's notes. So he said, 'You know, the guys are really working hard. They're up against it. We have to go a little easier.'"

"George had the utmost respect and trust from all the people around him, and he had the utmost trust and respect for them, too. If that's what George wanted, you were going to give it to him, and top it if you could."

Conversely, among the traditional backlit graphics seen elsewhere in the movie, there is also an innovative computer animation.

The sequence can be seen on board the Death Star as it approaches Yavin 4. It was created by Wash, Teitzell, and O'Bannon and the visual effects house Image West, using that company's Scanimate analog computer animation system.

"With Scanimate," Wash recalls, "the Image West team could take the image from a high-resolution video camera, and then warp it, twist it, and make it move around. All the artwork we put in front of their camera was black-and-white, ►

► and they'd use the system to colorize anything we wanted."

Layers of effects could be built up in stages using Scanimate, albeit with a slight loss of quality on each pass. "So you didn't want to have too many generations before you decided, 'This is what we like,'" says Wash.

"It wasn't like the digital realm these days, with nondestructive editing," he continues. "If you'd built something from five pieces and, as you were adding piece number six, you realized piece number three didn't work correctly, you had to dump the whole thing and start again. We were wise to that, so we started with the hardest stuff. We managed to get everything we needed in about eight harrowing hours!"

As with Larry Cuba's trench run briefing animation, the resulting graphics were captured for film by pointing a camera at the computer screen. The sequence was then composited into the Death Star command center's monitoring screen in postproduction.

EYES ON THE FUTURE

Along with Image West, another innovative company that Lucasfilm worked with on *A New Hope* was Information International Inc., also known

**"LAYERS OF EFFECTS
COULD BE BUILT UP
IN STAGES USING
SCANIMATE, ALBEIT
WITH A SLIGHT
LOSS OF QUALITY..."**



06

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

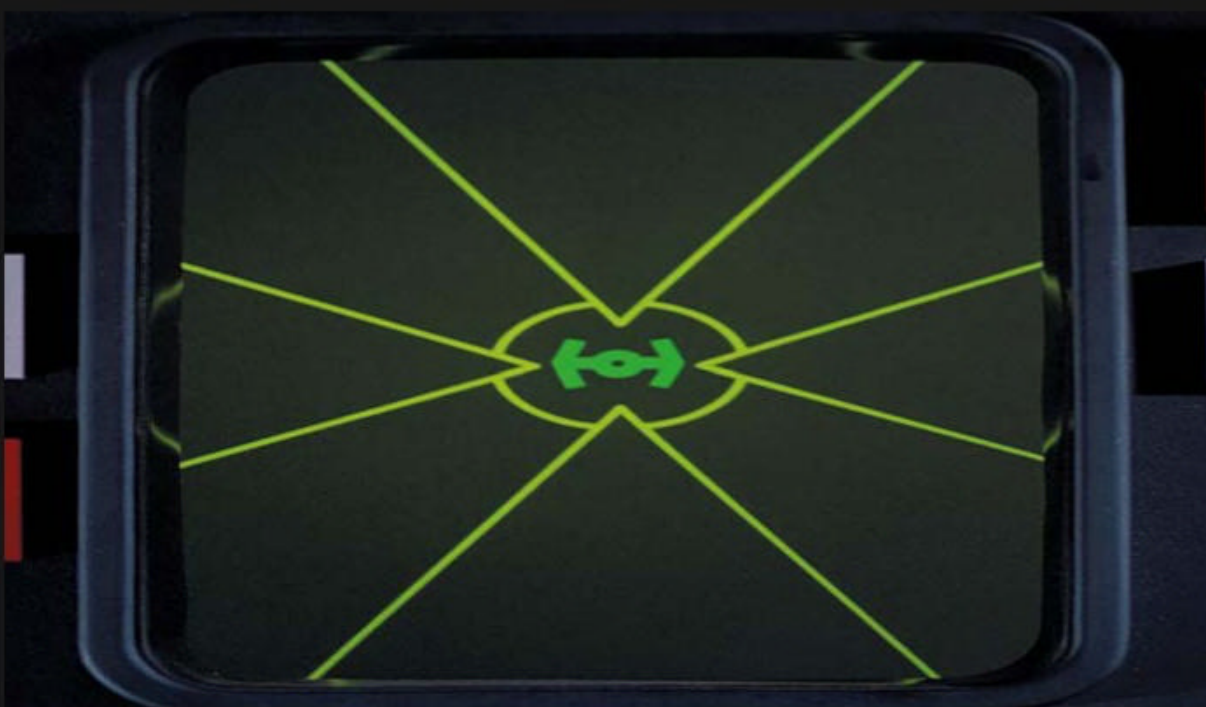
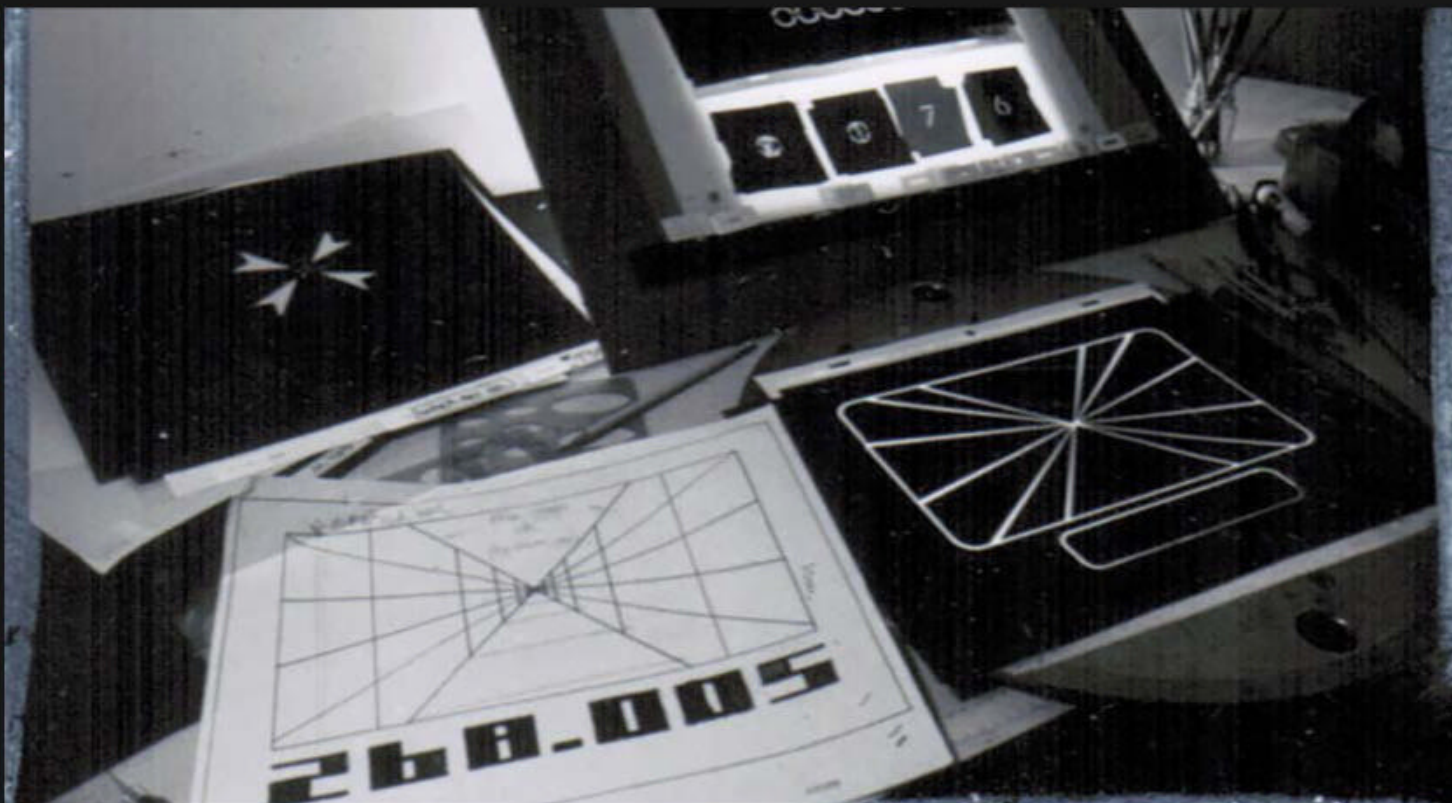
At one point during preproduction of *A New Hope*, George Lucas and his team considered filming the Death Star graphics without computer technology. John Wash, Jay Teitzell, and Jim House came up with a proposal to create the entire sequence using high-contrast model photography and other techniques to make it look as if it was computer-generated, because, as Wash recalls today, "computers just weren't very powerful." Lucas soon rejected the idea in favor of Larry Cuba's computer animation, but Wash got his chance to contribute to the sequence the following year, when he completed the final part of the animation using traditional methods [see main text]. "It just took a long time for me to get the job," Wash laughs on recalling it today.

as Triple-I. Triple-I had provided some impressive computer graphics for Michael Crichton's sci-fi thriller *Westworld* in 1973, and George Lucas was intrigued enough by their work to commission some 3D image tests.

Though nothing from Triple-I made it into *A New Hope*, Lucas remembered the company when *The Empire Strikes Back* went into production, and further tests were carried out. Most notable among these were a high-resolution computer-generated X-wing fighter model, and a lower-resolution five-ship animation, complete with anti-aliasing and motion-blur.

Though the results were impressive, Lucas decided once again not to use them on screen. He was convinced,

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however, that such tools had a viable future, and in 1979, he established Lucasfilm's own Computer Division, hiring computer scientist (and future co-founder of Pixar) Ed Catmull as vice president.

Other key early members of the Computer Division were Alvy Ray Smith, who joined as project leader and director of computer graphics research, Tom Duff, who had previously worked with Catmull at the New York Institute of Technology's Computer Graphics Lab, and fellow programmer William Reeves. One of the team's first major projects was the pioneering

06 The X-wing targeting computer is so iconic, you can get it on a T-shirt! (See left.)

07 Early artwork for different aspects of Luke's targeting computer.

08 An unlucky TIE fighter gets caught out by Luke.

"Project Genesis" sequence for 1982's *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, after which Duff and Reeves turned their attention to developing a proprietary animation system for the division.

BACK TO THE DEATH STAR

The timing was perfect for *Return of the Jedi*, which, like *A New Hope*, called for cutting-edge computer

graphics during a rebel briefing about the Death Star. Duff and Reeves were tasked with creating six CG shots—about 30 seconds of animation in all—to feature in the briefing that takes place aboard *Home One*. They largely worked alone because, in Duff's words, "Who knew how to use the animation system? Just me and Bill, because we were the ones writing it!"

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I started up a program that I had written years before, trying to emulate the abstract analog computer films that the animator John Whitney made in the 1950s. I spun some knobs on the Picture System, and this spherical thing came up on the screen with this beautiful motion. When I showed that to Joe and George, they said, ‘It’s perfect!’”

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

The technology for transferring Duff and Reeves’ animations from their computer screen onto film was relatively unchanged from the system used by Larry Cuba for *A New Hope* six years before. A customized Mitchell animation camera was loaded with high-contrast film stock, and then used to photograph the graphics frame-by-frame. The main advance was that one of the Computer Division’s hardware

09 The rebels plot the end of the Empire.

10 Technology improved rapidly in the years between *A New Hope* and *Return of the Jedi*.

11 O’Bannon, Teitzell and John Wash going over exposure tests (top right).

12 Wash and Teitzell with the Oxberry animation stand (bottom right).

techs wired the Mitchell directly to the Picture System 2, in order to trigger the camera with each successive frame displayed on the computer screen.

Several passes had to be filmed to create the final animation, because the Picture System’s screen was monochrome. Each differently colored section had to be filmed in isolation, with optical printer operator David Berry and optical photography supervisor Bruce Nicholson using color filters to build up the multicolored graphics seen in the finished film.

Working from storyboards by visual effects art director Joe Johnston, the pair used an Evans & Sutherland Picture System 2 graphics terminal to create computer animations of the Death Star, Endor, and the energy shield that connects the two.

“It didn’t have much memory,” Duff recalls today, “so the complexity of what you could draw in one pass was extremely limited. To get the final effect, you had to shoot many different passes.

“We created the Death Star in two parts,” he continues. “I did the side that was finished, and Bill did the side that was not, and we teamed up to fit them together into a single model. The surface of Endor was a model that I designed myself.

“For the force field that comes up from the moon and goes around the Death Star, I spent a lot of time trying to find something dynamic that suggested a magnetic or electric field. One day, having just about given up on it,

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ALPHANUMERIC SOUP

Among the many display graphics to be seen in *A New Hope* are various examples of written readings, but none are recognizably in English or any other Earth language. As John Wash recalls, "That's because George Lucas didn't want anything to really relate to Earth culture. So where there were things that looked like they should have writing, we used a Letraset typeface that we could cut up with X-Acto knives and turn into our own alien lettering.

"We discussed it with George, and in the end he did let us use numbers that were recognizable. I remember I wanted a rangefinder in the macrobinoculars, and I got permission to use numbers that didn't have any real scale to them. And Jay Teitzell used real numbers for a countdown in Luke's X-wing as he is making his final run in the X-wing. Details like that just help the audience to make some sense of things."

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Division had largely established the basics for modern postproduction methods.

"Movies are made completely differently now, and it's kind of our fault," laughs Duff, who returned to Pixar in the mid 1990s and has twice been honored with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Scientific and Engineering Award. "We built the editing system that was the prototype for the Avid system that everybody uses now. And we built the digital compositing system that replaced the optical printers."

John Wash, who went on to become a visual effects supervisor on TV shows like *The X-Files* and *Smallville*, also marvels at the evolution in technology. "I'm blown away," he says. "I loved doing scenes where some of the elements came from reality and then

you'd make them do your bidding in the world of compositing. But the things that can be done these days with CGI are phenomenally impressive." 🙌

"It was one pass for every color, and in some cases more than one pass," recalls Duff. "Some of the finished shots were 15 layers plus the live-action plate.

"What made it harder was that all of the equipment we were using was on the second floor of the building, and the floor was springy. People walking by would cause the camera to bounce enough that you could see it on the screen, so we mostly shot at night when there were very few people around. Even then we had to ask people not to go anywhere near the room!"

MOVING ON

Duff left the Computer Division in 1984, and two years later Lucas sold its services, including the Pixar Image Computer, to Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, leading to the founding of Pixar Animation Studios. By this time, the

"A CUSTOMIZED MITCHELL ANIMATION CAMERA WAS LOADED WITH HIGH-CONTRAST FILM STOCK..."

“At its heart, beyond its mythological trappings, *Star Wars* is a series of movies that draws inspiration from a multitude of genres.”





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CINEMATIC FORCES

THE MOVIES THAT INSPIRED *STAR WARS: THE LAST JEDI*

Writer, director, and cinephile Rian Johnson imbued his entry into *Star Wars* with themes and imagery influenced by the movies he loves. So how do they help us understand *The Last Jedi*?

WORDS: MICHAEL KOGGE

A

t its heart, beyond its mythological trappings, *Star Wars* is a series of movies that draws inspiration from a multitude of genres. This was apparent right at the beginning. The original 1977 film was born of George Lucas' love for Westerns, samurai films, old-time slapstick, screwball comedies, war pictures, and 1930s science-fiction serials.

His genius was taking what he loved about each and creating a fantastical bricolage set in a galaxy far, far way. Subsequent chapters in the saga continued this method of blending genres, and the latest episode, writer-director Rian Johnson's *The Last Jedi*, proved no different.

No stranger to homage, Johnson had imbued his previous films with a reverence for cinema of the past. *Brick* (2003) is a high-school pastiche of 1940s and '50s American film noir and Italian Spaghetti Westerns; *The Brothers Bloom* (2008) is a crime caper with loving nods to Federico Fellini's *8 ½* (1963) and Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970); and *Looper* (2012) is a science-fiction film that mixes *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Children of Men* (2006) with French New Wave films, the Western *Shane* (1953), and the Harrison Ford thriller *Witness* (1985). When developing the script for *The Last Jedi* back in 2014, Johnson returned to his cinephile roots. He found inspiration in old Hollywood war pictures, particularly *Twelve O'Clock High* (1949), along with the classic Japanese film *Three Outlaw Samurai* (1964), the Alfred Hitchcock-helmed *To Catch a Thief* (1955), and even the gonzo sci-fi camp of *Flash Gordon* (1980).

One of the best ways to fully understand a creative work is to study its influences, so let's take a closer look at these four films, and see how each one made its mark on the direction and themes of *The Last Jedi*. By no means a definitive list, what follows is, instead, merely a jumping-off point from which to explore the wealth of cinematic visions that helped shape the latest entry in the *Star Wars* saga.

TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH

DIRECTOR: HENRY KING
(20TH CENTURY FOX, 1945)

From its title alone, *Star Wars* promises epic battles in space, and in this regard, *The Last Jedi* does not disappoint. The film opens with a thrilling dogfight of Resistance X-wings and A-wings against First Order TIE fighters. Poe Dameron leads the charge for the Resistance in *Black One*, blasting all the turbolaser batteries on the First Order's Dreadnaught. Seeing an opportunity to destroy the Dreadnaught entirely, Poe then disobeys General Organa's command and calls in the bomber squad to make its run against the giant warship. The A-wings and X-wings position themselves in a protective formation around the bombers, while Dameron fends off TIE pursuers. The inspiration for the sequence comes from both



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Johnson's research and *Twelve O'Clock High*.

"I read a lot about World War II bombing runs," Johnson said in an interview for *Wired*. "How they worked and how [the bombers] were big, un-maneuverable beasts that the more nimble fighters would have to protect... I also looked at a bunch of World War II movies. So, *Twelve O'Clock High* was a big reference for me."

Set during the early days of America's entry into World War II, *Twelve O'Clock High* tells the story of Brigadier General Frank Savage, played by Gregory Peck, and his ordeal to transform the undisciplined and war-weary 918th Bomb

Group into a formidable fighting force. Adapted by Sy Bartlett and Beirne Lay, Jr. from their own novel, and directed by Henry King, *Twelve O'Clock High* differs from most other war films of the time in that it depicts a realistic and grim view of the war from the eyes of the Army pilots and airmen. These soldiers have become jaded from countless precision daylight bombing raids on Nazi-held areas that took the lives of many of their comrades. General Savage intends to instill order and boost morale, but at the end of the film, suffers a nervous breakdown of his own. The film shows that the brutality of war can crush the mettle of even the most disciplined of men.

Apart from this grim message, what makes *Twelve O'Clock High* stand out nearly 70 years later—and one of the reasons the Library of Congress selected it for preservation—is the kinetic bombing run that occurs toward its climax. Cinematographer Leon Shamroy filmed the actors in mock cockpits and fuselages, and editor Barbara McLean combined those shots with documentary footage of American and German planes engaged in actual aerial combat during the war. The film opens



01 / The design of the Resistance StarFortress bombers was based on World War II Flying Fortresses.

02 / Resistance fighters support the bombing run.

02

with an acknowledgment that the air battles were photographed by members of the USAF and German Luftwaffe, and the Oscar award-winning sound recording of Thomas Moulton bridges the studio and documentary footage so that the viewer never questions what is authentic and what is not.

Johnson drew on *Twelve O'Clock High* as an example of what he wanted in the opening battle scene of *The Last Jedi*, just as George Lucas had used the fighter plane sequence in the British film *The Dam Busters* (1955) to pre-visualize the Death Star trench run in *Star Wars: A New Hope*. Johnson's efforts began with the design of the Resistance's MG-100 StarFortress SF-17 heavy bombers, which were modeled on the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses deployed by the U.S. Army in World War II and seen in *Twelve O'Clock High*. Both craft have a spherical cannon located on the bottom of the fuselage, and Johnson's shots of Paige Tico spinning in the belly turret of the *Cobalt Hammer* and firing at TIEs mirror those of B-17 gunners releasing their rounds on Luftwaffe fighter planes in *Twelve O'Clock High*.

Johnson also sought to conjure up the same camaraderie between the Resistance pilots that was front and center with the USAF airmen in *Twelve O'Clock High*. Poe, Paige Tico, bombardier Nix Jerd, A-wing wingleader Tallie Lintra, and a host of other pilots and personnel work together as a well-oiled team, and *The Last Jedi* establishes their characters quickly and efficiently through close-ups and their cockpit banter. Although Paige appears on screen for less than a minute, it's a testament to Johnson's abilities that her sacrifice resonates with a powerful emotional punch to the gut that forces the audience to experience the same loss that her sister, Rose, also feels. Echoing *Twelve O'Clock High*, *The Last Jedi* mourns the demise of even minor characters, stressing that the glories of war are bitter ones, couched in sorrow and death.

03



03 / The casino on Canto Bight was modeled on the glamor of Monte Carlo.

TO CATCH A THIEF

DIRECTOR: ALFRED HITCHCOCK
(PARAMOUNT PICTURES 1955)

Dens of iniquity have always been a staple of *Star Wars* films, from the Mos Eisley cantina and Jabba's palace to the Outlander nightclub and Maz Kanata's castle. Johnson creates another such den in *The Last Jedi*'s Canto Bight, but one in which the seediness is far better hidden. Speaking to *Empire*, Johnson explained how he strove to capture the "romantic scale and grandeur" of the French Riviera that Alfred Hitchcock brought to the screen so deliciously in *To Catch a Thief*.

In this thriller, written by John Michael Hayes and based on David Dodge's novel, Cary Grant plays John Robie, an American expatriate who has long since retired from his postwar career as a jewel thief. Once widely known as "the Cat" for his abilities to prowl on rooftops and sneak into rooms unnoticed, Robie now devotes his time to

managing vineyards and orchards in the south of France. But when a number of wealthy vacationers are robbed of their jewels, the French police are convinced that the Cat is back to his old tricks, and come snooping around Robie's villa.

26-year-old Grace Kelly enters the story as Frances Stevens, the beautiful, spoiled daughter of a rich widow who owns an assortment of diamond jewelry. She soon turns up the heat on the handsome, older Robie, and as the attraction between them mounts, so do the questions. One doesn't know until the film's end if Robie has actually given up his life of crime, or if he's exploiting his relationship with Frances for a chance to steal her mother's precious stones.

The French Riviera as pictured in *To Catch a Thief* gave Johnson a visual template for the location of Rose and Finn's first adventure, where their relationship begins to grow. Johnson imagined Canto Bight as the Monte Carlo of the *Star Wars* universe—a coastal city replete with five-star hotels, gorgeous beaches, and classy casinos. Croatia's walled city of Dubrovnik, on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, radiated the 1950s charm and romance Johnson wanted for Canto Bight. Only the richest of the rich gamble and party here, and their number includes ▶



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04 / Finn marvels at the opulence of Canto Bight.

05 / The muted tones of the Canto Bight casino are a visual nod to Hitchcock's film.



05

► the suave and sophisticated Master Codebreaker the duo are seeking.

The introductory shots of the Canto Casino are a deliberate wink to the gaming palace in *To Catch a Thief*. Both locations have color palettes of muted browns and greens, and the same off-white overhead source lighting. All the background characters in both casinos are dressed to the nines in gowns and tuxedos, and have money to burn in games of roulette and craps (or the science-fiction equivalent). One could envisage

“The introductory shots of the Canto Casino are a deliberate wink to the gaming palace in *To Catch a Thief*.”

Finn and Rose switching places with John Robie, but for the surprise that the Cat would experience at coming face to face with sentient felines and assorted alien creatures of the *Star Wars* universe!

To Catch a Thief's influence doesn't end with the production design. Johnson wrote and filmed a sequence very much inspired by the concluding scenes of Alfred Hitchcock's film, where John Robie slinks along the rooftops, searching for the real cat burglar. Johnson's version for *The Last Jedi* had Finn and Rose chasing after the Master Codebreaker on the rooves of Canto Bight before getting caught by the cops. While that scene eventually ended up on the cutting room floor, Finn and Rose do momentarily end up on the rooftops while riding the fathiers away from the police.

THREE OUTLAW SAMURAI

DIRECTOR: HIDEO GOSHA
(SAMURAI PRODUCTIONS 1965)

George Lucas has acknowledged that Akira Kurosawa's samurai films, particularly *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), influenced many of the plot points of the original *Star Wars*, from its quest to save a princess to its tagalong lowly peasant characters, reconfigured by Lucas into the droids C-3PO and R2-D2. Johnson also looked to the *chanbara* (samurai) genre for inspiration, particularly *Three Outlaw Samurai*, made by director Hideo Gosha.

Gosha's film is a prequel to the 1963 Japanese television series of the same name, about a trio of ronin (masterless samurai) who wander Japan lending their swords to protect the defenseless and the poor. In contrast to Kurosawa's



06 / Rey finds herself without a master, as did Gosha's ronin.

07 / Johnson looked towards the *chanbara* (samurai) genre for inspiration.



“Johnson modeled the character DJ, played by Benicio del Toro, after Sakura, one of the three samurai in Gosha’s film.”



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traditional treatment of the values of honor and loyalty, Gosha veers toward nihilism, depicting a cruel world of gruesome violence and shifting alliances. His action scenes are wild and unexpected, and he often cuts from a shot of classical widescreen beauty to a close-up of a weapon’s violent—and bloody—death stroke.

“This is that era where they were trying stylistic things that were a little funky or a little more out there,” Johnson explained to pop-culture website *Uproxx*. “Style-wise, it’s got something that was going to push it out beyond what we maybe expected from a samurai film. The direction of that movie is incredible. But then, also, there’s the unexpected camaraderie, this uneasy alliance with these samurai.”

Three Outlaw Samurai opens with a wandering ronin, Shiba, who encounters three peasants holding the daughter of a local

magistrate hostage. Rather than obey the normal codes of honor and rescue the girl, Shiba listens to the grievances the peasants have against the tyrannical magistrate and decides to side with them. As the film proceeds, two other samurai join the peasant cause, though not without mortal consequences. When the three ronin walk down the road together at the end, they have achieved no lasting victory, leaving only death in their wake.

The film’s pulpy swordplay encouraged Johnson to push the melee combat in *The Last Jedi* and choreograph feats and acrobatics not seen before in a *Star Wars* film. Moreover, Johnson modeled the character DJ, played by Benicio del Toro, after Sakura, one of the three samurai in Gosha’s film. Gosha introduces the filthy Sakura as a prisoner in the magistrate’s jail, just as Johnson introduces DJ in Finn and Rose’s cell. Both men look nothing like what they actually are—Sakura is an exceptional warrior and DJ a talented thief—vindicating the ancient proverb that one should never judge a book by its cover—or a man by his clothes.

The Last Jedi also shares *Three Outlaw Samurai*’s interrogation of heroism. Finn, Poe, and Rey make noble attempts to save the

- galaxy and friends they love, yet for the most part they fail in their immediate quests. Poe Dameron doubts the strategy of Vice Admiral Holdo, and goes so far as to commit mutiny against her. Finn and Rose's mission to disable the hyperspace tracker only further endangers the Resistance because of DJ's betrayal. And Rey's efforts to convince Luke to join the fight against the First Order appear to fall short and cause her to leave Ahch-To without the fabled Jedi Master aboard the *Millennium Falcon*.

This is not to say *The Last Jedi* is a meditation on failure. For, despite their initial stumbles, Poe, Finn, and Rey survive and are reunited to fight another day. They may have made errors, but their resolve is not broken. Neither is that of Gosha's three outlaw samurai. As they stroll down the road in the film's last shot, they will no doubt venture into another village where they will be called upon to protect the weak. Even when facing the constant savagery of tyrants, these samurai have not lost faith in trying to make the world a better place, and neither have our Resistance heroes.

08 / Like Sakura in *Three Outlaw Samurai*, the devious DJ is not all he seems.

09 / Poe's mutiny is an extension of *Three Outlaw Samurai*'s study on heroism.



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FLASH GORDON

DIRECTOR: MIKE HODGES
(DINO DE LAURENTIIS CO. 1980)

Flash Gordon may not have been one of the films Johnson drew direct inspiration from, but he has stated that *The Last Jedi* shares its particular brand of wonder and imagination. In fact, the 1980 film has a historical connection to the *Star Wars* franchise. Before making *Star Wars*, George Lucas approached mega-producer Dino De Laurentiis about obtaining the movie rights for *Flash Gordon*, which originated as a newspaper comic strip drawn by Alex Raymond before garnering even greater popularity as radio, film, and television series. When De Laurentiis refused to sell him the rights, the director decided that if he couldn't make *Flash Gordon*, his own film would at least capture the same otherworldly adventure and optimistic wonder that filled the panels of Raymond's comic strip.

At the time, De Laurentiis was busy trying to lure two of Italian cinema's greatest directors, Federico Fellini and Sergio Leone, to direct a *Flash Gordon* movie, but nothing came of his attempts. In the wake of the success of *Star Wars*, De Laurentiis eventually produced a big-budget feature film version in 1980, hiring Mike Hodges, the filmmaker behind British gangster film *Get Carter* (1971), as director, with a screenplay by Lorenzo Semple, Jr., the mastermind behind the



10 / Snoke's throne room resembles that of Flash Gordon's nemesis, Ming the Merciless.

11 / Johnson wanted *The Last Jedi* "to have all the things tonally that I associate with *Star Wars*."

1960's *Batman* television series. De Laurentiis instructed Semple and Hodges to stress the "comic" aspect of the *Flash Gordon* comic strip, and what resulted became one of the campest sci-fi romps ever committed to celluloid. *Flash Gordon* never became the blockbuster hit that De Laurentiis intended, yet it lives on as a cult classic, owing to the fact that few science-fiction films so thoroughly embrace their own absurdity, and have so much fun while doing it.

Johnson wanted his *Star Wars* episode to possess some of *Flash Gordon*'s escapist pleasures. He knew he had to deal with some dark material set up by J.J. Abrams'

"Johnson wanted his *Star Wars* episode to possess some of *Flash Gordon*'s escapist pleasures."

The Force Awakens, but he didn't want darkness to overwhelm the whole film. "I also made a real conscious effort for it to be a riot," he admitted to *Rolling Stone* magazine. "I want it to have all the things tonally that I associate with *Star Wars*, which is not just the Wagner [operatics] of it. It's also the *Flash Gordon*."

Like *Flash Gordon*, Johnson's film includes a healthy dose of zany humor, from Luke's casual tossing of the lightsaber over his shoulder, to Poe Dameron's taunting of General Hux as "Hugs." The saturated colors of *Flash Gordon*'s visual palette are also to be seen in *The Last Jedi*—in the colored crystals buried in the salt flats on Crait, the striking armor of the Praetorian Guard, and Supreme Leader Snoke's red-curtained throne room, which bears a striking resemblance to that of Flash Gordon's nemesis, Ming the Merciless (played by *The Force Awakens*' Max von Sydow).

In one of *Flash Gordon*'s wackiest scenes, Flash communicates to love interest Dale Arden using telepathy. Instead of utilizing technology to transmit thoughts, as Flash does, Johnson chose to have Snoke bridge the minds of Rey and Kylo Ren through the Force, expanding on the Force telepathy between Luke and both Leia and Vader in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Finally, Johnson also packed his film with last-second escapes, never-ending cliffhangers, and nick-of-time rescues, which propel the plot of *The Last Jedi*. Fittingly, these are the stock ingredients of the same 1930s adventure serials (like the original *Flash Gordon* starring Buster Crabbe), which inspired George Lucas. 🍷

PLAYLIST

Several classic feature films echo the themes, events, and character interactions of *The Last Jedi*. For fans of cinema, or if you're just looking for a great movie to sit down with, then you could do a lot worse than give any of these a try:

RASHOMON (1950)

Anyone who ever enrolled in a film studies class has probably watched Akira Kurosawa's debut film. A masterpiece of world cinema (and unreliable narration), *Rashomon* presents multiple contradictory accounts about the murder of a samurai, just as *The Last Jedi* retells Luke and Ben Solo's encounter in the Jedi Temple from—as Obi-Wan Kenobi might say—their "certain points of view."

THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI (1957)

This Oscar-winning classic directed by David Lean tells the fictional story of American and British prisoners-of-war forced to build a railway bridge for their Japanese captors. Johnson reflects the tense relationship between William Holden's brash American army officer and the strict British colonel played by Alec Guinness in the tug-of-war for authority between hotshot Poe Dameron and the wiser Vice Admiral Holdo.

GUNGA DIN (1939)

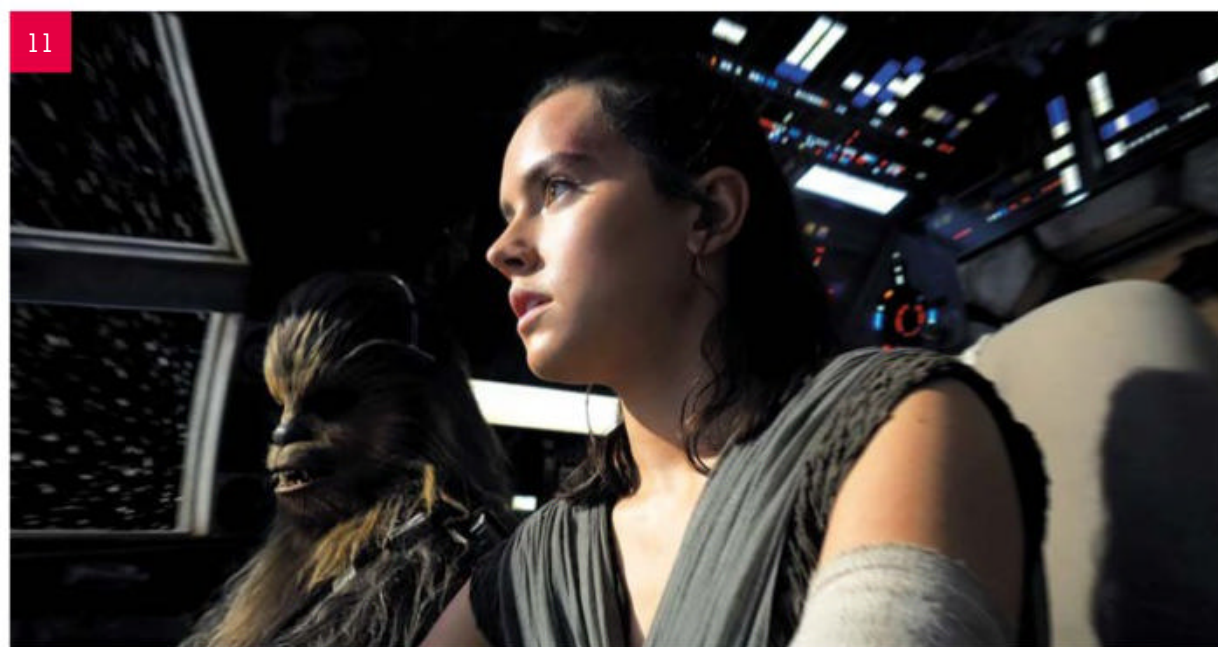
Starring Cary Grant, director George Stevens' adaptation of a Rudyard Kipling poem and short story follows three British soldiers on a mission to defeat a religious cult in 1880s colonial India. Johnson's fondness for the film's sweeping, swashbuckling adventure and sense of camaraderie, made him want to impart the same light-hearted touch to *The Last Jedi*.

LETTER NEVER SENT (1959)

A landmark of Soviet cinema, *Letter Never Sent* is the bleak tale of a team of geologists searching for diamonds in the forbidding tundra of Siberia. Director Mikhail Kalatov's panoramic black-and-white footage of the desolate wilderness immerses viewers in the natural environment, much as Johnson does with his shots of Crait's barren landscape.

SAHARA (1943)

In this World War II film directed by Zoltán Korda, Humphrey Bogart plays the U.S. master sergeant of a lone M3 tank on the run from Axis forces in the Libyan desert. Johnson appropriated this plot element for *The Last Jedi*, as the First Order chases the Resistance's dwindling forces to annihilation.



11



GALACTIC GEOGRAPHIC

Real-World Scientists Take a Look
at the Environments of *Star Wars*

WORDS: DANIEL WALLACE

A

galaxy far, far away might be an ideal backdrop for a space fantasy, but can a fairy-tale setting stand up to actual scientific rigor? Clearly not, and that's okay. *Star Wars* isn't governed by literalism, but by narrative simplicity and the "rule of cool." The real-

world principles of geography and anthropology, however, can reveal fascinating truths about the saga's unseen architecture—and shed new light on what makes our own planet so special.

Each *Star Wars* world is typically defined by a single, dominant environment: ice sheets, sand dunes, forests, salt flats, and so on. Because these biomes all have their own Earthlike equivalent, credentialed scientists (who also happen to love *Star Wars*) are happy to put their degrees to work analyzing everything from the tundra of Hoth to the sinkholes of Utapau.

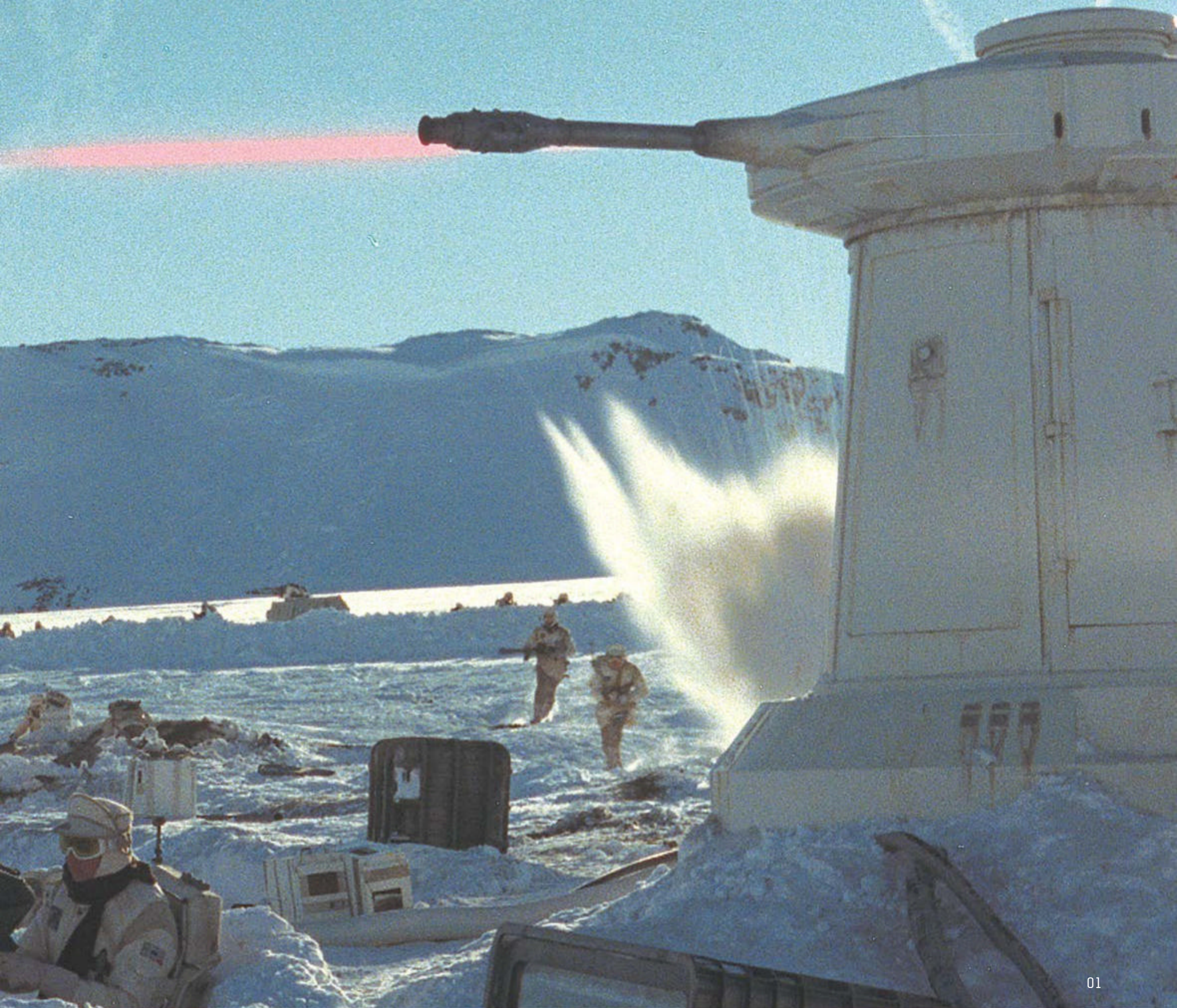
Insider asked archaeologist Jeff Wedding and geologist Amy Brock-Hon to take a whistle-stop tour of the *Star Wars* galaxy, and interpret our favorite sci-fi landscapes through their uniquely professional lenses.

THE ARCTIC:

HOTH

Despite being a subzero glacial world, Hoth nevertheless sustains herds of tauntauns and solitary wampa predators. The Echo Base rebels survive thanks to thermal heaters and fur-trimmed parkas, and like Antarctic researchers at Earth's southern extreme, they don't dare risk death by venturing out during storm conditions.

Arid-environment expert Amy Brock-Hon notes a similarity between Hoth and the desert world of Tatooine (see overleaf). "Hoth is an arid region, too!" she says. "It's all about precipitation. If it isn't



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in the form of water, then it can't be taken up by plants to cover the landscape. On Earth, Antarctica is considered one of the driest regions in the world."

From what we can see of Hoth during Luke's tauntaun patrol, its surface is composed of thick glacial ice. This means that the planet's true geography could be a hidden mystery.

"We might be able to use ground-penetrating radar to see the rock surface under the ice, but unless there's a peak of rock sticking out somewhere it would be very difficult to determine what's in the subsurface," explains Brock-Hon. Because Antarctica's

ice is nearly 5 kilometers deep at its thickest point, one can imagine that conditions on Hoth would be equally severe.

"A big question is how the ice on Hoth is developing, and whether its ice pack is increasing," says Wedding, who raises the question of Echo Base's long-term preservation. "A glacier actually flows a few inches a year. If an airplane wreck is at the top of a glacier, it will move through the ice as the glacier moves downslope and probably reappear 70 years later, ground into pieces by the force of all that ice."

But if Echo Base finds itself on more stable footing, it would

remain an exceptionally pristine archaeological site for generations of galactic historians.

"Everything in it would be freeze dried—almost like Han Solo in carbonite," Wedding confirms, noting that woolly mammoth carcasses are still found in northern Russia after nearly 40,000 years. "Because the water is in a solid state you won't have metal rusting, and the microbial community (microorganisms that populate the same living space) is probably very small. The encampments used by the early explorers to the South Pole are in a perfect state of preservation, and something similar would probably happen here."

01 Hoth's arid conditions could well preserve the remains of the rebel base for centuries.

THE SANDY DESERTS:

TATOOINE AND JAKKU

Tatooine is the first planet seen in the *Star Wars* saga, and its bone-dry dunes have appeared extensively throughout the films. The Jakku of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) is a close match to Tatooine in climate, but its sandy wastes are dotted by the half-buried wrecks of Imperial Star Destroyers as opposed to the skeletons of krayt dragons.

What happened on these two worlds that resulted in such Saharan expanses? Geologist Brock-Hon has a specialty in the geo-morphology of arid landscapes, and she says she's seen it all before.

"I'm fond of deserts like these because of how extreme they can be, and how their unique features can be sculpted by the wind," she says, pointing out that Tatooine and

*IF TATOOINE'S MOISTURE FARMERS ARE
SCRATCHING OUT A LIVING ON THE RAZOR'S
EDGE OF STARVATION, JAKKU IS EVIDENCE OF
A THREAT OF A DIFFERENT NATURE.*

Jakku have shifting landscapes that change from day to day. "The dunes are mobile, since sand grains are blown up one side and slide down the other, and they can move dramatically if the winds are blowing. And of course it's all driven by a lack of vegetation, since there's nothing there to hold that sediment down."

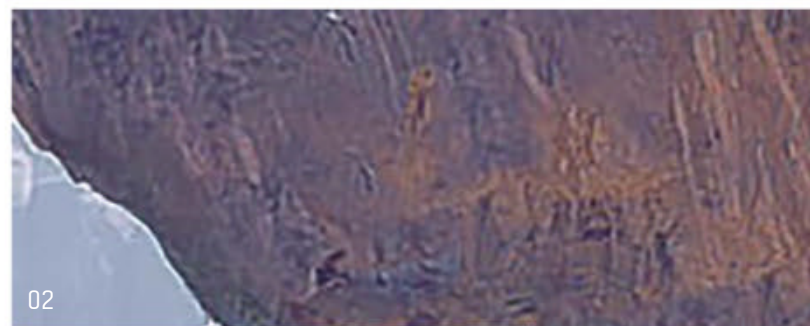
That near-global absence of greenery raises the question of how homesteaders like Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru hope to raise crops in such barren fields. The Lars homestead appears to get by using small-scale hydroponic farming, but terraforming larger portions of the Tatooine landscape is hardly out of the question.

"The area around the North Platte River in central Nebraska used to be dunes and is now grasslands," says Brock-Hon. "You can anchor a dune by placing soil and vegetation on it. But since the sand is super-permeable, it would be a problem for those settlers. Maybe silt, clay, or organic material could hold the water for irrigation, but their first goal would be to trap enough water."

That's where vaporators come in. According to *Star Wars* lore, they distill moisture from the atmosphere that can be collected and reused. It would make sense to build vaporator settlements near existing areas of moisture, and archaeologist Wedding thinks that this could offer a hint on the nature of Tatooine's pre-history.

"Southern Nevada is a desert now, but 12,000 years ago it was covered with lakes of standing water," he says. "As the area dried out and warmed up, the location of the remaining water sources forced human adaptation." Because the job of archaeologists is to apply models of human behavior to the surrounding environment, Wedding can't help but ask how Tatooine homesteaders started and perfected their craft.

"The first question is, 'who's here and where are they living now,' and the next is 'where is the water that makes



02

this happen?" he says. "They have the vaporator equipment to extract moisture and there's no other evident water source, but what was the landscape like 100 years ago? The Lars homestead shows signs of adaptations that archaeologists would notice, such as construction below ground where it's cooler and easier to regulate temperature."

If Tatooine's moisture farmers are scratching out a living on the razor's edge of starvation, Jakku is evidence of a threat of a different nature. Wedding—whose archaeological specialty is in military history—calls the planet's scattering of starship hulks the perfect subject for the "archaeology of conflict."

Wedding has located similar wartime wrecks from ill-fated Army Air Corps training flights over the Nevada desert during World War II. And when weapons belonging to two opposing forces are preserved at the same site (Star Destroyers, AT-ATs, and X-wing fighters, for example), the locations of the debris can reveal a great deal.

"At the Battle of Little Bighorn, it wasn't until archaeologists in the 1980s used modern forensic approaches to ballistic studies that they were able to track just how badly the U.S. military was outnumbered, outgunned, and outmaneuvered by the Native Americans," he says. Since military after-action reports are often favorable to the home team, the Battle of Jakku can't truly be understood without examination. "To read a battlefield like the one on Jakku is to gain insights that were never documented in the official histories," Wedding suggests.

02 Tatooine's
Mushroom
Mesa.

03 The
magma-
belching
hell of
Mustafar.



THE VOLCANO:

MUSTAFAR

Lit by flickering red flames and the orange glow of oozing lava, Mustafar is a hellish world of sulfur and brimstone first seen in (2005). It is here that Darth Vader lost his duel with Obi-Wan Kenobi, inspiring Vader to build a brooding castle retreat in later years, as seen briefly in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016).

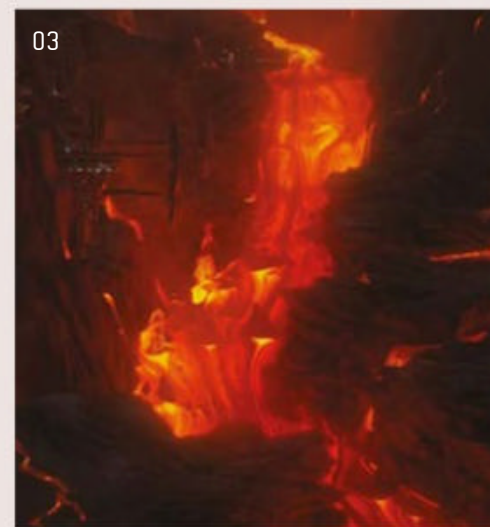
Brock-Hon thinks Mustafar could be a world that has suffered so many orbital impacts that its surface temperature has been raised to the extreme. “Maybe the atmosphere is no longer protecting it from meteor and comet strikes,” she says. “That kind of bombardment would be constantly heating up the crust.”

On the other hand, Mustafar could be an embryonic world—a work-in-progress planet that will eventually result in a far more hospitable environment.

“One of my lectures is called ‘Birth of the Earth,’ and I show an artist’s image of a similar world that has volcanoes and a molten surface,” she says. “Mustafar’s fiery conditions could indicate it’s a newbie planet, with a surface just like Earth’s once was.”

Volcanic rock dating indicates that Earth was formed over 4.6 billion years, so don’t expect quick results from Mustafar. “It might be on a several billion-year time-scale,” admits Brock-Hon, “but as long as Mustafar experiences the same factors as our Earth, it might turn out just the same way.”

03



THE ROCKY DESERTS: GEONOSIS AND JEDHA

The arid expanses of Geonosis and Jedha seem similar to those on Tatooine and Jakku, but these are far more vertical. Rocky pinnacles, narrow canyons, and flat-topped mesas make for a zigzagging horizon, and a single force is responsible for shaping it all.

“Water,” says Brock-Hon. “What we see with all those caverns and caves suggests that water was there in the past, even if wind activity is primarily at work now.” Because the water-sculpted Utah Canyonlands contain structures similar to those found on Geonosis and Jedha, Brock-Hon deduces the existence of an unseen river system, or at least a similar water source that existed in the distant past. “After that water is gone, they might start to see more dunes migrating across the landscape,” she says. “High winds will start to scour the surface and erode the rock formations, dumping the resulting sand grains into dune formations.”

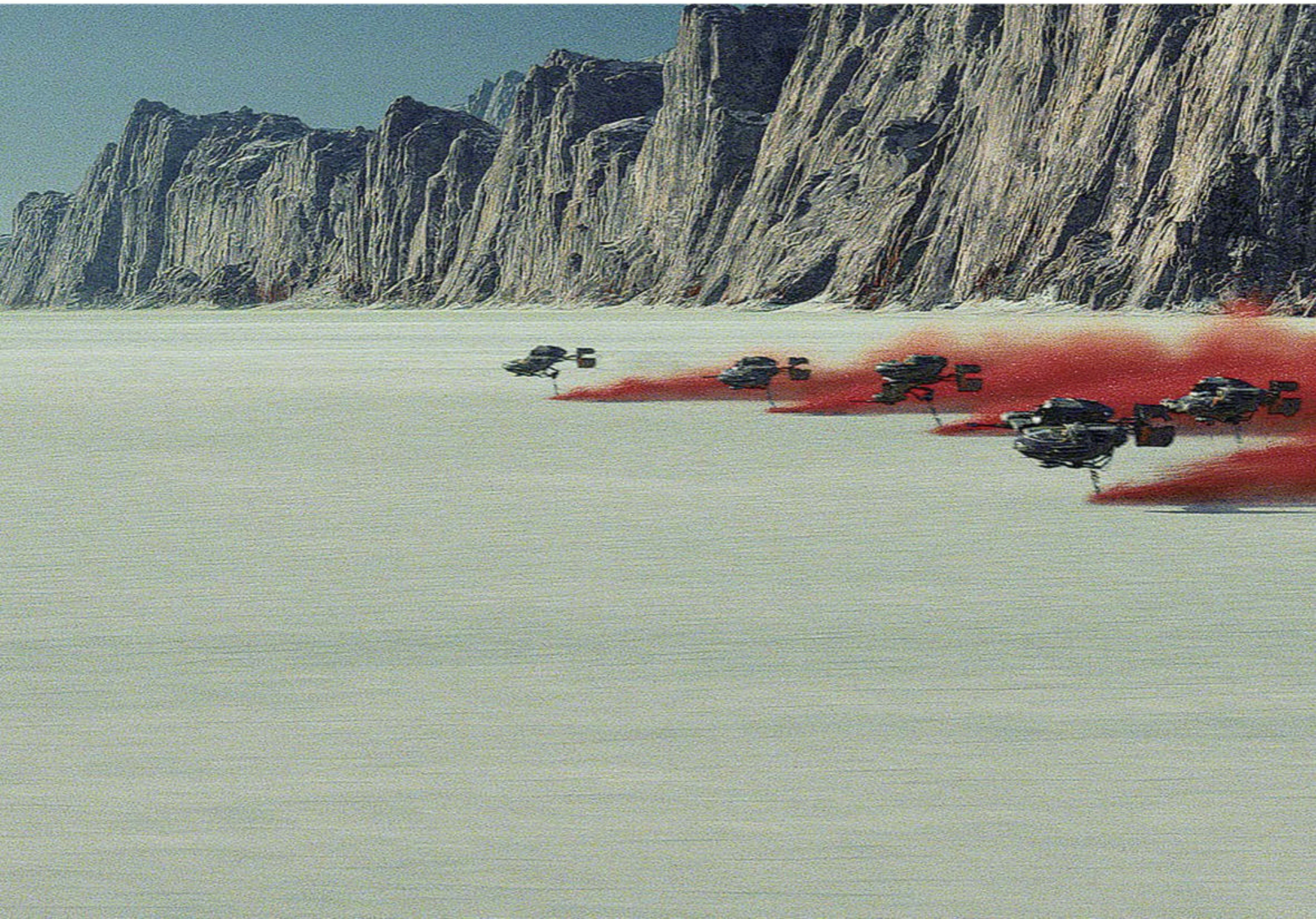
For an archaeologist like Wedding, the

hive tunnels of Geonosis offer the tantalizing prospect of perfectly preserved alien artifacts.

“Dry climates allow for longer preservation,” he says, “and in a desert area like Geonosis I’d expect to find differential preservation with stone artifacts well preserved in the open desert and wooden objects or skeletal remains preserved in sheltered areas like caves. In my field, sometimes we’ll even find naturally dehydrated mummies.”

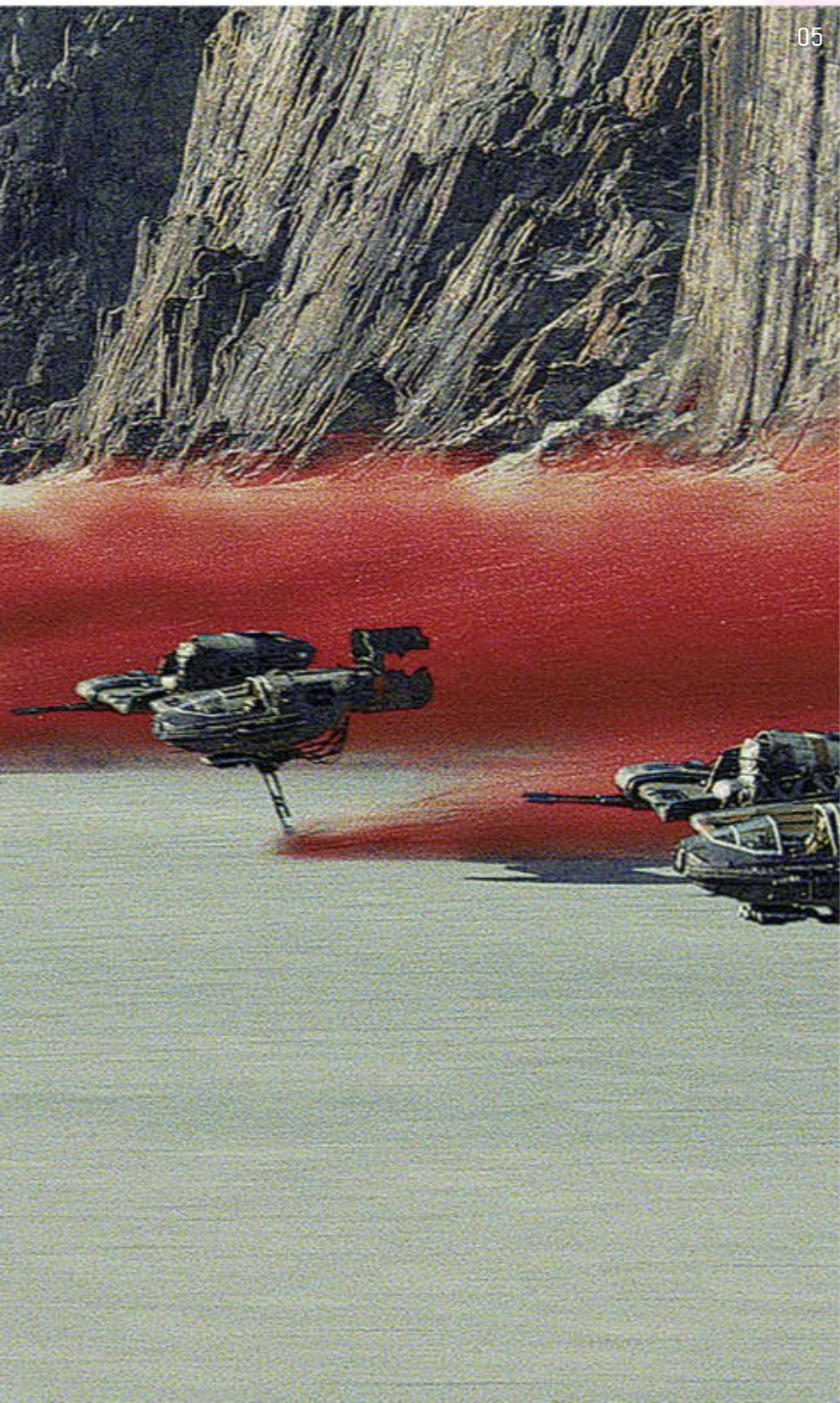
Jedha is said to be one of the oldest-settled worlds in the galaxy, and as the rumored birthplace of the Jedi Order, it is home to temples and sacred sites venerated by various Force-worshipping sects. Jedha’s Holy City is a walled architectural amalgamation that unites the work of generations inside a single sunbaked metropolis.

“In the older cities in Europe you often find something similar to Jedha,” says Wedding. “There you’ll discover neighborhoods that are hundreds of years old, with continuously occupied dwellings, and right next to them is a street where the buildings have been knocked down and rebuilt into something brand new.”





JEDHA'S HOLY CITY IS A WALLED ARCHITECTURAL AMALGAMATION THAT UNITES THE WORK OF GENERATIONS INSIDE A SINGLE SUNBAKED METROPOLIS.



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04 The rocky landscape of Jedha suggests water was abundant in the past.

05 Crait's salt flats are much like those of Earth's Death Valley.

THE SALT FLAT:

CRAIT

The climactic battle in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) might evoke the conflict at Echo Base from *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), but in truth, Crait has far more in common with parched Tatooine than snowy Hoth.

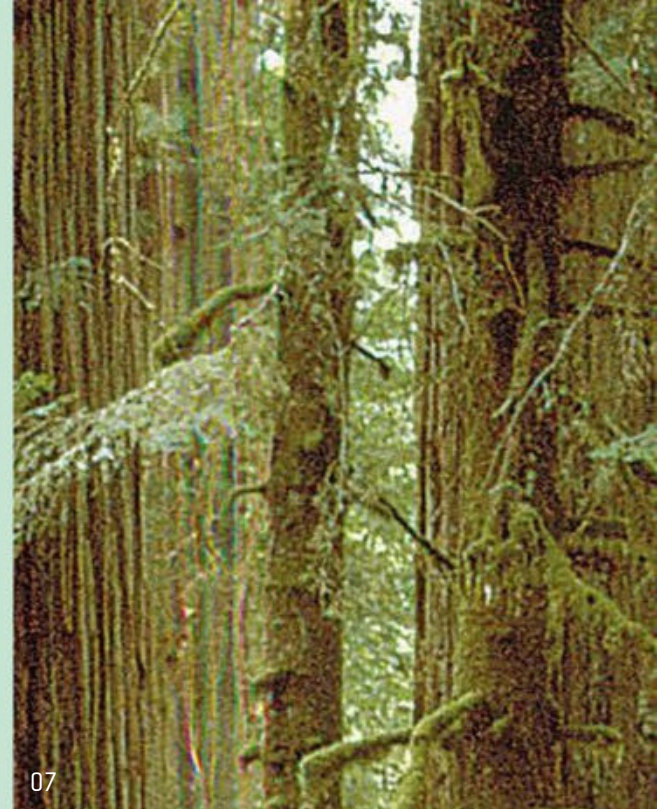
“What we see of Crait is a salt flat or playa,” says Brock-Hon, “and they typically form in low spots between mountain ranges.” New salt layers are made when rain washes weathered mineral material from the higher elevations into the shallows. “The arid surroundings quickly evaporate the water molecules from the dissolved solution, and what’s left behind is lots and lots of salt.”

On Crait, the alkaline environment can apparently support complex life forms such as the crystal-furred and fox-like Vulptices that tinkle like wind chimes when they move. In contrast, the Earth’s salt flats are lifeless. Or are they...?

“A classic example of that type of environment is Badwater Basin in California’s Death Valley, which is hostile to most forms of life,” says Brock-Hon, who adds that a lot of work is currently being conducted on halophiles: salt-loving organisms that thrive in saline environments. “When I worked in South America’s Atacama Desert, I got to know someone doing research on organisms that survived that hyper-arid region in the salt layers,” she says. “This is the kind of research that could determine if there might be life on Mars.”



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THE TEMPERATE EARTH:

NABOO

First seen in *The Phantom Menace* (1999), Naboo has a surface environment of grassy plains and waterfalls, making it appear pleasantly Earth-like. Its undersea civilization and a warren of tunnels winding through the “planet core,” however, hint at something far stranger.

For geologist Brock-Hon, any literal interpretation of submarine passages through the core implies the potentially catastrophic loss of the planet’s magnetic field. “There’s evidence that Mars used to have water and an atmosphere before it all went away,” she says. “One of the leading theories is that Mars cooled off completely. Once its molten core cooled off, it stopped generating a magnetic field.” Without that protection, there’s the possibility that solar winds could have blown away Mars’ atmosphere. Although any number of sci-fi factors could be invoked to save Naboo from a similar fate, Brock-Hon can’t

help but stress the real-world gravity of the situation. Should Earth’s magnetic field ever weaken to that degree, “it’d be bad,” she says. “It’d be really nasty.”

Archaeologist Wedding is intrigued by Naboo’s giant stone heads. These immense sculptures, festooned with ivy tendrils, stand guard over the misty swamps.

“The question is, who built these and what was their meaning and purpose?” he says. Though the movie offers scant clues, Wedding notes that Naboo’s natives seem to be treating the monolithic sculptures according to a hands-off approach known as “arrested decay.”

“They’re not actively maintaining them, but they’re not knocking them down either,” he points out. “A lot of Egyptian temples fell out of favor and were simply abandoned, and the Moai statues on Easter Island don’t have the same ties as they did to the groups that built them. These heads could be something the locals respect, but they’ve just decided to allow the natural weathering to continue.”

THE FORESTS:

ENDOR AND YAVIN

In *Return of the Jedi* (1983) California’s redwood forests formed the real-world stand-in for the forest moon of Endor, home to the arboreal, tree top-dwelling Ewoks.

“That kind of environment implies a lot of precipitation,” says Brock-Hon, “possibly driven by the position of nearby mountain ranges. Our redwoods lie on the wet side of the northern Sierra Nevada, so I’d expect something like that.” The omnipresence of Endor’s greenery also implies a lack of, or significant distance from, the corrosive waters of saline seas. “Sea spray would be an issue, so I’d expect the forests to be far away from any coastline.”

Archaeologist Wedding sees little hope for the long-term preservation of Ewok artifacts. “Wood naturally decays, and that kind of vegetation requires a lot of rainfall. With that much moisture, the microbial communities will cause the wood to rot and break down over time.” Even the Ewoks’ elaborate treehouses are at risk, which implies that the native builders engage in near-constant maintenance. “Those natural fiber ropes will break down very quickly,” says Wedding, “and within a few years, the forest will start to reclaim everything.”

That’s not the case on Yavin 4, the jungle moon from which the Rebel Alliance launched its attack on the Death Star. The rebels constructed their HQ inside a sturdy stone temple, and exterior shots of the site were captured on location in Guatemala at the Mayan ruins of Tikal.

Wedding points out that the Rebellion’s retrofitting of temples into war rooms has plenty of historical precedence. “When one population abandons an area, another typically moves in,” he says. “And because they might not share the same beliefs, a temple might instead look like a pretty good barn. The rebels coming to Yavin are much more utilitarian. They have a very different purpose for being there.”

The hewn stone blocks that make up Yavin 4’s structures are naturally resistant to environmental erosion, and much like the Mayan temples they will most likely stand for centuries to come. Future galactic generations might even one day tour the hangars where heroes and villains once did battle.

“Locations like Yavin and Hoth might become the equivalent of our national historic sites and part of the heritage tourism industry,” says Wedding. “People might go to Yavin to see where the rebel base had been, just like you might go today and visit the battlefields of Normandy.”





06 The lush plains of Naboo.

07 Constant repairs to Ewok homes would be required in Endor's damp conditions.

08 Deep sinkholes are not unique to Utapau.

THE SINKHOLE:

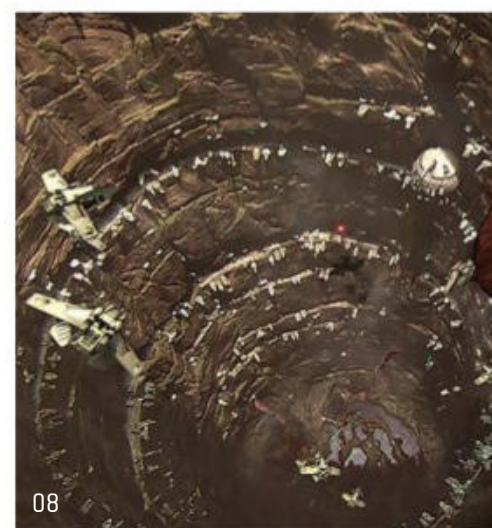
UTAPAU

Utapau might seem like one of the more exotic *Star Wars* environments, but sinkholes are hardly uncommon here on Earth. Brock-Hon notes locations in China and Vietnam with sinkholes and caves large enough to live inside, though certainly not at the scale seen on Utapau. The depth of the sinkhole cities, she notes, would allow the people of Utapau to access the subterranean water table and tap enough groundwater to supply their civilization.

Because every lost object on Utapau would drop straight to the bottom of the sinkhole, Wedding sees the world as an irresistible opportunity for archaeologists. "I'd target the bottom of those sinkholes immediately," he says. "Stratigraphy (the order of strata, or layers) is our guiding principle: people drop stuff, it gets covered, and people drop more stuff. In theory, the deeper you go, the older the stuff gets. A *Pokémon* card on top, a T-Rex fossil way down at the bottom."

Each one of Utapau's sinkholes would be a historical treasure trove equivalent to Los Angeles' La Brea tar pits (home to millions of fossil discoveries), he notes, adding that similar natural pitfall traps accumulate an enormous amount of information across the eras.

The same principle also works on a smaller scale. "Working on an American colonial site, it's great when you find the foundations for the house," says Wedding. "But it's even better if you find the hole the family dug out for the privy so you can examine its contents."



08

UNSUNG HEROES

It takes a galaxy of heroes to make a saga like *Star Wars*, but not all of them achieve the legendary status of the Skywalkers. *Insider* salutes some of the less celebrated but no less heroic stars in that firmament.

T

he Last Jedi closes with a group of children reenacting the adventures of a mythical legend known as Luke Skywalker. Like Rey before them, they idolize the tales of this almost mythical figure, little realizing that

without the help of people just like them, Skywalker's struggle to defeat the evil Empire could never have been won. People like plucky pilot Wedge Antilles, or duplicitous space pirate Hondo Ohnaka, or even Imperial agents-turned-rebels like Aleksandr Kallus.

The truth is that true heroism can come in many shapes and forms, from the simple act of making the right decision at the right moment, to standing up to bullies, or in simply supporting your friends in their time of need.

The *Star Wars* saga is littered with such characters—the unsung heroes of the galaxy—whose actions are driven by various motivations, yet whose assistance and often sacrifices have played a crucial role in the successes of the heroes of whom tales are told...





THE PILOT

WEDGE ANTILLES

- FIRST APPEARANCE / *A NEW HOPE*
- PORTRAYED BY / DENIS LAWSON

Wedge Antilles was destined for a life in the skies. Born on the planet Corellia, and learned the ins and outs of complex flight mechanics at a young age, working in fuel depots and farm outposts. His piloting abilities developed fast, and before long he was flying cargo ships. But like many of his generation, he joined the Imperial Academy in search of better opportunities and more advancement than a hauling freight could ever offer. His uncanny flying ability was soon identified, and he was sent to the planet Montross to train as a TIE fighter pilot at Skystrike Academy. It was during his time here that Antilles witnessed the true face of the mighty Imperial war machine as it steamrolled anything that lay waiting in its path. With a desire to defect to the Rebellion, Wedge Antilles was noticed by the mysterious rebel agent known only as Fulcrum, and his future path was set.

Antilles answered the call to join Red Squadron, taking the call-sign Red Two. Flying in numerous engagements, most notably the Battle of Hoth, his ingenuity and skill in piloting a tiny T-47 airspeeder toppled a mighty AT-AT walker.

His leadership qualities were second-to-none, and as the rebel fleet massed near to the planet Sullust to prepare for the attack on the second giant Death Star, Wedge was the commander of Rogue Squadron. Upon entering the superstructure, Antilles and General Lando Calrissian blew up the reactors, which created a chain reaction that destroyed the deadly weapon.

This blow meant the Empire was all but finished, but Wedge still had important work to do on missions to Akiva and during the Battle of Jakku. Wedge could at last retire when the signing of the Galactic Concordance declared that the Empire's rule was finally over.

THE ARMS DEALER

NIEN NUNB

- FIRST APPEARANCE / *RETURN OF THE JEDI*
- PORTRAYED BY / MIKE QUINN (VI-VIII)
AND RICHARD BONEHILL (VI)

Though the Rebel Alliance had sought allies in every corner of the galaxy, few could have imagined that an arms dealer and smuggler would help turn the tide of the Galactic Civil War.

Starting out as a freighter pilot for the SoroSuub Corporation (which supported the Empire), Nien Nunb at first proved his opposition covertly, by stealing from his employers and giving the proceeds to the Rebellion. Before long, he branched out as an independent arms dealer, and committed himself fully to the growing Rebel Alliance shortly after the Battle of Yavin, helping to smuggle Alderaanian refugees from his home planet, Sullust, after the Empire destroyed their world.

Reunited with his old friend General Lando Calrissian, Nunb served as Lando's co-pilot during the Battle of Endor. Diving fiercely into waves of Imperial TIE fighters on board the *Millennium Falcon*, Calrissian and Nunb entered the station alongside Wedge Antilles, firing the shot that took out the main reactor.

Years later, Nunb piloted Resistance starfighters against Snoke's First Order during the Battle of Starkiller Base. As a long-serving ally of General Organa, he stood with the Resistance leadership on the bridge of the *Raddus* as their base on D'Qar was evacuated, and was one of the few survivors of the Battle of Crait, once more carrying hope with him aboard the *Millennium Falcon*.



THE SOLDIER

CAPTAIN REX

• FIRST APPEARANCE / *THE CLONE WARS*
 • VOICED BY / DEE BRADLEY BAKER

Loyalty and dependability are key attributes in the battle against the forces of evil, and CT-7567—known to his fellow comrades as Captain Rex—has both of those in abundance. As a member of the Republic's mighty clone army in the war against the Separatists, Rex's leadership qualities quickly came to the fore, and he soon rose to the rank of captain in Torrent Company, a leg detachment of the 501st Legion. This led the Captain to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with hero of the Republic General Anakin Skywalker as his second in command. Respectful but always willing and able to offer his wise viewpoint on important matters, Rex became an invaluable presence on the battlefields during conflict.

The closest bond Rex formed was not with Skywalker, however, but with the Jedi Knight's Padawan, Ahsoka Tano. Together they fought against the Separatists on Naboo, Ryloth, Malastare, Geonosis, and elsewhere. Brave, imaginative, and unusually independent for a clone trooper, tales of his exploits and leadership became an inspiration for fellow clones across the cosmos.

Towards the end of the Clone Wars, Rex was inspired to remove the inhibitor chip in his brain to become fully independent of his superiors. This made him one of the very few clone troopers not to obey Order 66 when Chancellor Palpatine issued the command. Instead, he removed himself from the theater of war for a decade and a half, finding sanctuary alongside some similarly liberated comrades—former Republic commandoes Gregor and Wolffe—on the desolate world of Seelos. When he was thrust into battle once again by the arrival on the planet of a small band of rebels, he helped Kanan and his company fight the now firmly established Empire. His innate sense of justice and decency was a key asset as the seeds of rebellion continued to grow and thrive.



FACT FILE

Rex's preferred weapons are a pair of DC-17 blasters.



FACT FILE
Anakin Skywalker owned a statue of Maz.

THE PIRATE QUEEN MAZ KANATA

• FIRST APPEARANCE / *THE FORCE AWAKENS* • PORTRAYED BY / LUPITA NYONG'O

Known across the stars as the pirate queen, the reputation of Maz Kanata precedes her. Force sensitive, intuitive to the point of premonition, and unwilling to take any nonsense from those who refuse to follow her rules, Kanata gave those she welcomed into her castle respite from the trials of galactic life.

Her age plays no small part in her wisdom. More than one thousand years old, Maz has traveled the galaxy and seen most of it. Collecting antiques and oddities, she made her home on Takodana, far out in

the Western Reaches of the Mid Rim. Her lakeside castle became a safe haven for underworld types heading into the interior or out to the rim. Offering a bed for the night, information, food, and her singular knowledge, Kanata was highly regarded in such circles, and because of this the castle was a constant hive of activity.

Kanata hold the belief that physical objects could hold memories, and that was shown to be true when Han Solo brought Rey, scavenger from Jakku to the castle.

Wandering catacombs full of antiquities, Rey touched Anakin Skywalker's long-lost lightsaber and images flooded through her mind. Kanata insisted Rey follow her destiny and take the blade, but she refused. The weapon was entrusted to Finn.

With her castle destroyed in a First Order assault as Kylo Ren hunted down Rey, Kanata hit the space lanes once again. Staying active and always on the move, Kanata was still able to assist Poe Dameron with information that would help save the Resistance.



THE BUSINESSMAN

HONDO OHNAKA

• FIRST APPEARANCE / *THE CLONE WARS*
• VOICED BY / JIM CUMMINGS

In a galaxy littered with nerf herders, scoundrels, and moof milkers, there are few who match the cheek and roguish charm of Weequay pirate Hondo Ohnaka. Leading his eponymous Ohnaka Gang with his trusted Kowakian monkey-lizard, Pilf MukMuk, on his shoulder, Ohnaka operated on the world of Florrum on the Outer Rim from his sunken pirate base. When the Empire came to power, it destroyed the base and the Ohnaka Gang soon dissolved. Ohnaka himself went it alone as an independent pirate and smuggler, making an okay living for himself, but falling below his own lofty aspirations.

Hailing from the world of Sriluur, Ohnaka has more of a heart than he'd ever care to admit. Sparring with General Obi-Wan Kenobi, he silently aided the Republic and later the Rebellion, giving them critical information and assistance, often turning a blind eye to their exploits while also turning a profit. First and foremost a businessman, Ohnaka also has an eye on the bigger picture.

With friends in all quarters of the cosmos, Ohnaka counted the bounty hunter Jango Fett as a trusted friend, and once entered into a romantic relationship with another bounty hunter—Aurra Sing—proving beyond doubt that he was more than happy to dice with danger.

THE EWOK

WICKET W. WARRICK

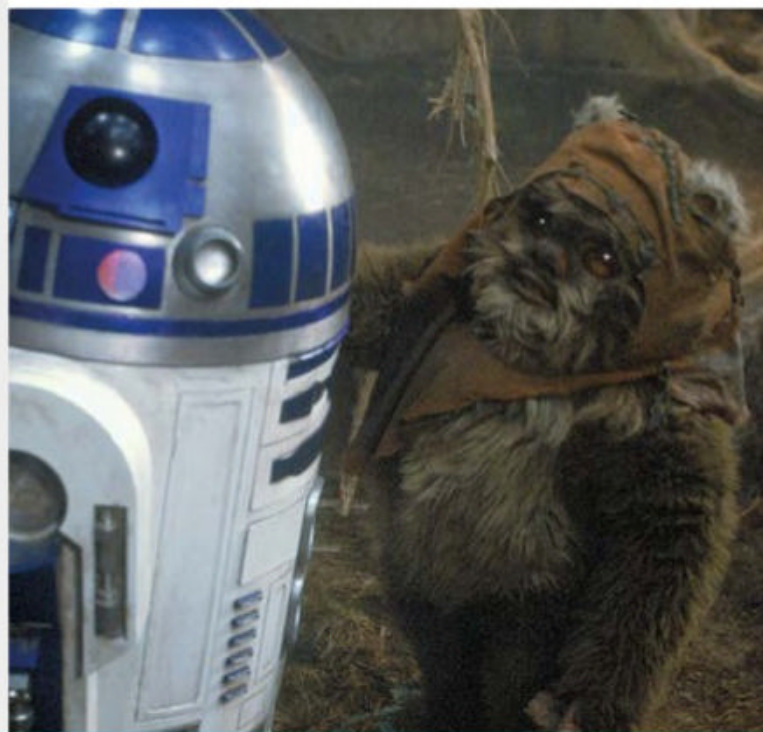
• FIRST APPEARANCE / *RETURN OF THE JEDI*
• PORTRAYED BY / WARWICK DAVIS

If proof were ever needed that size matters not, then the entry into the Galactic Civil War of the diminutive Ewoks is that proof. When rebel forces arrived on the forest moon of Endor to knock out the Imperial shield generator protecting the second Death Star, Princess Leia was the first to meet its furry inhabitants, coming nose to snout with the young Ewok warrior, Wicket W. Warwick.

Wicket brought the prone Leia back to consciousness and helped her evade capture, taking her back to the tree-top home of his tribe. Meanwhile, the rest of the rebel party was captured and brought to the same village. It required the Force powers of Luke Skywalker and the unknowing assistance of C-3PO to convince the Ewoks that their guests shouldn't be roasted and served up as a late lunch.

With Wicket vouching for his newfound friend, and C-3PO using his capabilities as a storyteller and communicator to explain their predicament to the tribe, the Ewoks joined the fight against the Empire—and Wicket was at the forefront of the battle. He and Paploo helped the rebels gain entrance to the shield bunker by drawing Imperial forces away, and Wicket raised the alarm when the rebel team was captured. The ground element of the Battle of Endor erupted as the Ewok army began its attack.

The inquisitive nature of Wicket often got him into trouble as a youngster, running counterpoint to the usual Ewok traits of nervousness and caution. Wicket was wise enough to sense that Leia was a friend, and that leap of faith saw the Rebel Alliance gain a knowledgeable ground army—the final piece in a jigsaw puzzle that ended in defeat for the Empire and the Sith.



THE WARRIOR

ADMIRAL RADDUS

• FIRST APPEARANCE / *ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY*
• PORTRAYED BY / PAUL KASEY

The journey from obscurity to glory can take many forms. In the case of Admiral Raddus, the path led to the heights of rebel command. Born six decades before the Battle of Yavin, Raddus served his homeworld of Mon Cala as part of its planetary defence force, and as the mayor of Nystullum city. When the Empire came to occupy Mon Cala, Raddus took his city-ship—the MC75 cruiser *Profundity*—and aligned it with the Rebel Alliance. It and other Mon Calamari city-ships were refitted to become Alliance capital ships, and Raddus was installed as one of the very first Mon Calamari officers in the fleet.

Raddus also served on the Alliance High Command—his hard-earned wisdom shining through his brash and crusty exterior. When the group was faced with news of the Death Star’s existence, Raddus favored a plot to steal the plans over surrender in the face of its unmatched might, but was overruled by Command leader Mon Mothma. When the admiral subsequently heard that a small taskforce had gone after the Death Star plans anyway, he raced the *Profundity* to its aid, giving the rest of the Alliance little choice but to join him in a full-on assault on the Imperial planet of Scarif.

In the resulting battle, Raddus orchestrated the rebel attack, buying the “Rogue One” taskforce the time it needed to transmit the Death Star schematics to the *Profundity*. The ship survived long enough to dispatch those plans to safety on board the *Tantive IV*, which was docked within it, but was too badly damaged to escape Scarif with the rest of the rebel fleet. Raddus died at the hands of Darth Vader’s forces, knowing that he had dealt the Empire a major blow. His name and reputation lived on in galactic history, and 30 years later the Resistance flagship commanded by General Leia was named the *Raddus* in his honor.



THE SQUADRON LEADER

GENERAL MERRICK

• FIRST APPEARANCE / *ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY*
• PORTRAYED BY / BEN DANIELS

Born on the planet Virujansi, Antoc Merrick was a true hero of the Rebellion. As the commander of Blue Squadron, he gave his life during the Battle of Scarif, while aiding the Rogue One taskforce in its mission to steal the Death Star plans.

Before joining the Rebellion, Merrick had proved his worth in combat as leader of the Rarified Air Cavalry on his homeworld. When the Empire took control of Virujansi, Merrick refused an offer to join the Imperial Navy in favor of early retirement. However, instead he left the planet to seek out and join the Rebellion, alongside fellow Virujansi native Garven Dreis, who would also become a squadron leader in the Rebel Alliance.

Merrick’s command abilities were recognized by the rebels with a commission as general in command of all starfighters at Base One on Yavin 4. He remained an active pilot, leading Blue Squadron in a T-65 X-wing starfighter, and also held a position on the Alliance High Command. When the rebel fleet came to the assistance of the Rogue One taskforce, Merrick led Blue Squadron’s X-wings and U-wings through the planet’s shield gate, taking out a number of AT-ACTs, buying time for the team on the ground. Soon after, he was shot down and killed by a TIE striker, his sacrifice an example of the millions who gave their lives in pursuit of freedom.



FACT FILE
Kallus' operating number was ISB-021

THE SECRET AGENT

ALEXSANDR KALLUS

• FIRST APPEARANCE / *STAR WARS REBELS* • VOICED BY / DAVID OYELOWO

The stories of the *Star Wars* saga often appear to be clear-cut battles of good versus evil. But, as we know, it's rarely that simple. Take Alexandr Kallus, the Imperial Security Bureau agent who began his career unwavering in his loyalty to the Empire. Trained at the Royal Imperial Academy on Coruscant under Wilhuff Tarkin, he ultimately defected to the Alliance to Restore the Republic, determined to bring freedom and justice back to the galaxy.

His Imperial activity took him from Onderon and Lothal to Lasan, where he was an active participant in the genocide of the Lasat people. His operations also saw him assist Lord Vader, Grand Moff Tarkin, and the Grand Inquisitor in their concerted efforts to snuff out the flames of rebellion.

But when he was trapped on the Geonosian ice moon of Bahryn with the Lasan warrior Zeb Orrelios, Kallus learned more about this small band

of rebels and their cause than he ever expected. This led to a change of heart that launched him on a path to become the latest rebel agent to use the codename Fulcrum. He fed much vital information to the Rebellion before his deception was discovered by Grand Admiral Thrawn. Facing execution at the hands of his former comrades, he made use of his years of Imperial training to escape and openly joined the rebel cause on Yavin 4.

The *Star Wars* Archive

Lights! Camera! Action!
Rare images from the
Star Wars photo archives.





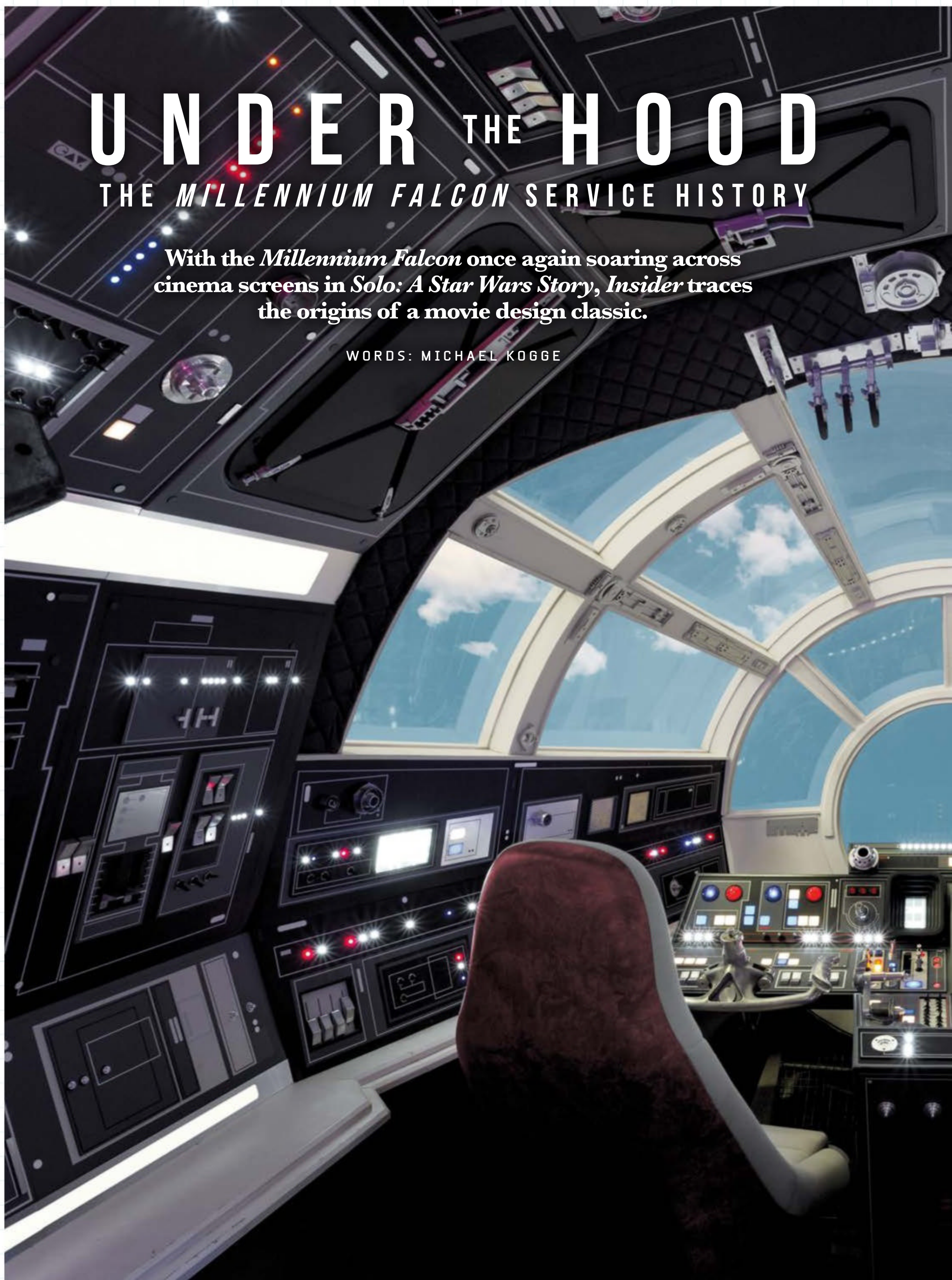
Puppeteers operate 'Lark and Jonk' as the *Solo: A Star Wars Story* 2nd unit crew shoot an element for the Fort Ypsosabaac game. Photo: John Wilson

UNDER THE HOOD

THE *MILLENNIUM FALCON* SERVICE HISTORY

With the *Millennium Falcon* once again soaring across cinema screens in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, *Insider* traces the origins of a movie design classic.

WORDS: MICHAEL KOGGE





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ne doesn't need to be a *Star Wars* fan to recognize the *Millennium Falcon*.

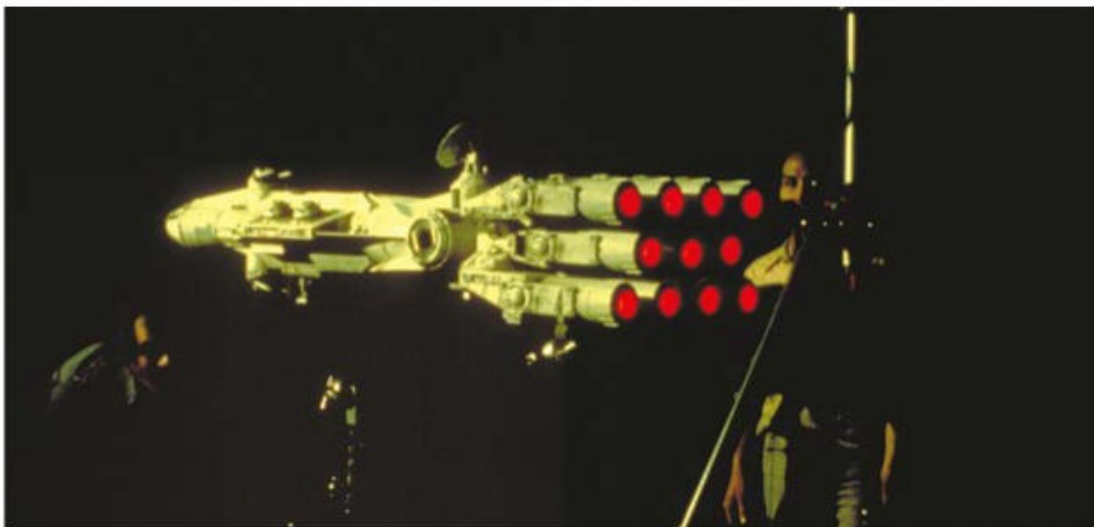
The spaceship's design—a saucer-

shaped body with an outrigger cockpit and two wedge-like mandibles—is positively unique when compared to the thousands of other more aerodynamic spacecraft that have graced the silver screen. Since the release of *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977), the *Falcon* has soared with the films' success, becoming one of the primary symbols of the saga and a genuine icon in popular culture. Put simply, nothing else in the movies—perhaps even in the galaxy—looks quite like the vessel that made the Kessel Run in less than twelve parsecs. But it might *not* have been that way...

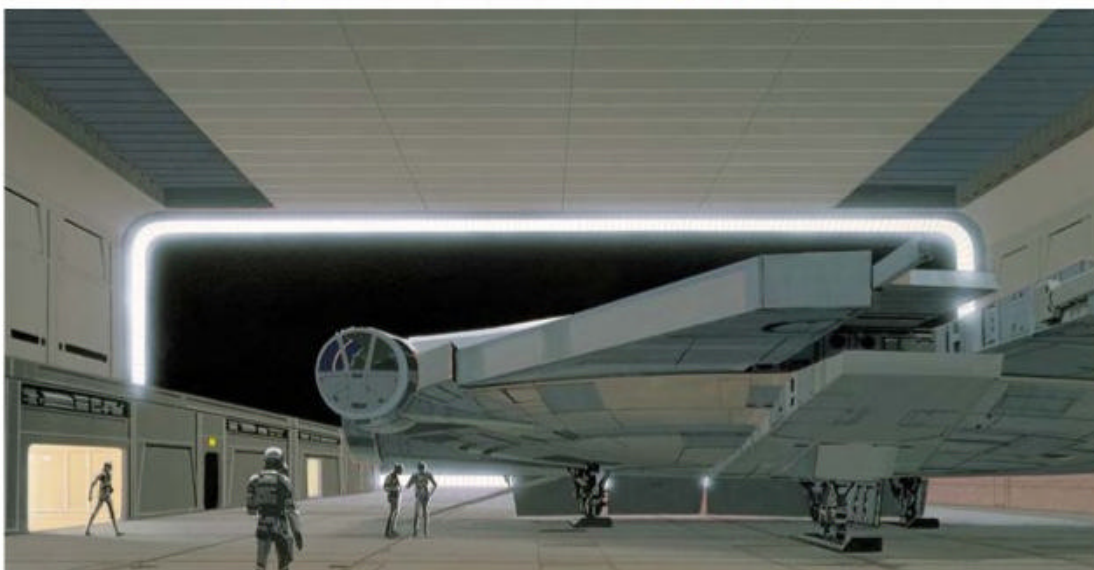
The First Falcon

In November 1974, writer-director George Lucas hired Colin Cantwell, an expert concept artist who had worked on *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), to help conceptualize the spaceships for *A New Hope*. Under Lucas' direction, Cantwell poached pieces from various store-bought model kits and glued them together to create physical prototypes for the X-wing, TIE fighter, Star Destroyer, and the *Millennium Falcon*, which in Lucas' script at that time was called the "pirate ship." Eschewing the complicated, technical conventions of modern aerospace engineering, the concept artist opted for a different aesthetic. He based his starship models on basic geometric shapes: squares, triangles, rectangles, and spheres. His elegance broke new ground in

01



02



production design and allowed the ships of *Star Wars* to stand out as true originals in science-fiction cinema.

The pirate ship proved a difficult challenge. Cantwell kit-bashed a model with a rounded cockpit at its bow and a rectilinear spine that terminated in a triangular set of engines. The other artist Lucas employed at the time, Ralph McQuarrie, turned Cantwell's creations into concept paintings. Lucas then used both representations to sell his script and the vision of his odd space-fantasy film to 20th Century Fox. Once studio

funding allowed for preproduction, a filming miniature of the pirate vessel was built based on Cantwell and McQuarrie's designs. But this version of the *Falcon* never made it to the final film.

Pork Burger

"The *Millennium Falcon* was a problem. I did a version emphasizing its power being a cast-off engine," Cantwell recalls. "Then another sci-fi production came out, with a sort of lizard-based ship that was way too close in gesture. That meant we had to break [ours] apart."

KENNER CLASSIC

Kenner Toys of Cincinnati, Ohio, hit the bonanza when they acquired the license to produce *Star Wars* merchandise in June 1977. Kenner's first wave of 3.75-inch action figures sold so well when they came out in 1978 that the company decided to manufacture a toy *Millennium Falcon* vehicle to the same scale.

Referencing photographs of the filming miniatures and the set, the Kenner design team—lead by Mark Boudreaux, who has had a hand in designing every Kenner iteration of the *Falcon* since then—drafted blueprints and made

prototypes of the toy, working in every detail that they could.

Their resulting design came to represent a landmark in the history of action toys, for the production of something so complex had rarely been attempted on such a mass scale. Two C batteries energized a high-pitched "battle alert" sound from the Kenner *Falcon's* engines, while the interior lounge, accessible under a removable section of the hull, was a playset in itself. Here, figures could practice lightsaber training, play holochess at a table, or sit in a

gun turret that "clicked" around a 360-degree axis. Floor compartments could hide figures for top-secret missions, while two more could sit in the forward cockpit and pretend to operate the ship's controls. Sticker decals added color and illustrative detail to the gray plastic.

The entire process, from conception to making the steel production molds, took nearly a year to complete, and the first *Millennium Falcon* landed on store shelves in early 1979, becoming a perennial favorite until Kenner discontinued the line six years later.

03

JAMES CLYNE: REFRESHING THE *FALCON*

Solo: A Star Wars Story's design supervisor, James Clyne, talks about his experience of re-making the *Millennium Falcon* for the younger days of Han Solo and Lando Calrissian.

When did you begin working on *Solo* and the new *Millennium Falcon*?

I got started on *Solo* in the fall of 2015, maybe even August 2015. I hired a small team of artists to jumpstart the visual language of what this new section of the *Star Wars* universe could be. I had about four artists working with me for the initial eight months, developing all the worlds and vehicles.

It started with conversations with the production team about what they were hoping to see. We wanted to make sure we gave them the freedom to express themselves, and see what kind of new and fresh ideas they would bring to it as well.

The *Falcon's* interior has an upgraded, futuristic look in the movie. How did that come about?

The one movie I kept going back to was *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In fact, for the interior of the Lando Falcon, I showed the crew a lot of behind-the-scenes set photography from *2001*, and used that as a direct reference. It's a cleaner, more optimistic universe. That's the approach we wanted to take with the new *Falcon*: since Lando was more of an optimist, his ship needed to reflect that.

What different versions of the *Falcon* did you have as film assets?

There was a full-size build of the *Falcon* on the back lot at Pinewood that was based off of my design with the draftsman. But it was slightly different than the others. It didn't have all the detail of the final digital asset, simply because we had more time at ILM to really finish it. And then there was the digital ILM asset that had at least six variations—or damage states—to it.

Did Ron Howard suggest any big changes to your concept for the *Falcon* makeover?

There was a fear of, "we're going to have to start over!" The fact that we didn't is a testament to how wonderful Ron Howard is. He came in and didn't change much. The only real change Ron made was helping us figure out the color of the striping on the top exterior of the *Falcon*. It now has a little bit of an automotive paint quality to it, and reflectivity. Ron was very happy with the design that we had laid out beforehand, which was such a relief.

A key moment Ron added to the story was this *The Fast and Furious*-type sequence where the camera went from the initial spark and explosion inside the engine and then raced backward out of the *Falcon*. You saw it ignite and start up the engines out of the back. It had a fun, "camera in the engine" kind of feel to it.



04

- 01 The original *Falcon* model, before the ship was redesigned.
- 02 Concept art by Ralph McQuarrie of the revised *Falcon* design for *A New Hope*.
- 03 The ship's cockpit has remained largely unchanged since it first appeared on screen in 1977.
- 04 One of the *Millennium Falcon* filming models in storage at ILM.

The British TV series, *Space: 1999* (1975), was that other sci-fi production. The main vehicle in the show was the *Eagle*, a moon shuttle that had a forward cockpit and an elongated fuselage that bore a striking resemblance to the early *Falcon* design. So on a flight back home from London, Lucas made a fateful decision that would change movie miniatures forever. He chose to scrap the \$25,000, seven-foot model his team at Industrial Light & Magic had built over several months, and began brainstorming new ideas for the pirate ship's look. Food provided welcome inspiration: "The flying hamburger was my favorite design," the film creator has been quoted as saying.

Lucas, ILM head John Dykstra, and concept artist Joe Johnston had fun with this novel look for the vessel, which chief model maker Grant McCune dubbed the "Pork Burger." Johnston added twin mandibles to give the ship a forward-facing appearance and 'hot-rodded' it out by expanding the rear engines. Lucas approved this design within a week. To save time in building, the model team sawed off the cockpit from the previous ship and attached it to the starboard side of the new model. Then, in order to save costs, for any exterior shots that required actors, such as the scenes in Docking Bay 94 or the Death Star berth, only a section of a life-sized

OWNERS AND UPGRADES

In *A New Hope*, Han Solo and Chewbacca are the owners and operators of the *Millennium Falcon*, but others have possessed the *Falcon* before and since:

Lando Calrissian customized the standard Corellian YT-1300 light freighter into one very sleek and pleasant ride. He re-upholstered the lounge seats and cockpit chairs with expensive yellow leather, decked out the captain's quarters into a posh stateroom, and shifted about cargo space to install a closet to house his collection of capes. He also altered the front mandibles to fit an advanced auxiliary ship that he called an escape pod. However, Lando's final upgrade was not one he ever wished to make. After his devoted droid L3-37 was blasted apart, Lando uploaded the contents of her memory banks into the *Falcon's* navigational system to assist Han and Chewbacca in their flight through the turbulent maelstrom around Kessel.

Han Solo and Chewbacca preferred speed over style, and therefore did little—if anything—to improve the interior or exterior of the *Falcon*. Their efforts and credits were spent on everything “under the hood” so to speak—the ship's internal components. During their tenure, the *Falcon* was jury-rigged with all sorts of black-market parts they could get their hands and paws on to help in their perilous smuggling ventures. They installed advanced—and often illegal—weaponry, re-routed the engine banks to push acceleration into overdrive, and modified the hyperdrive to perform beyond its safety measures. These changes, however, were always on the verge of causing the ship to break down, which could be particularly troublesome when the *Falcon* was being pursued by bounty hunters and the Empire.

Later, junk-dealer Unkar Plutt stole the *Falcon* from the Irving Boys after they stole her from Ducaim, who had previously stolen her from Solo and Chewbacca. Plutt had attempted to get the freighter into working condition, but eventually abandoned his efforts and allowed the ship to rust among the rest of the derelict hulks in a Jakku junkyard.

The *Millennium Falcon* made spacefall again when an orphan scavenger named Rey piloted her away from Jakku, and the *Falcon* was reunited with former owners Han and Chewie. Following the tragic demise of Solo, Rey ‘officially’ took the pilot's seat, with Chewbacca at her side.



- *Millennium Falcon* set was constructed. But the original pirate ship model did not go to waste. A hammerhead-shaped cockpit was placed on the front and the miniature was reused as the rebel craft seen in the film's opening sequence, otherwise known as Princess Leia's blockade runner, *Tantive IV*.

All in a Name

Lucas christened the spaceship the *Millennium Falcon* in his March 15, 1976 draft of the *Star Wars* script—but the origins of its name now seem lost to history. Some believe it was inspired by the John Huston-directed film *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), while others claim the name was a playful inversion of *Space: 1999's Eagle*, with 1999 switched to “millennium” and “eagle” morphed into another bird-of-prey—the “falcon.” However the cargo freighter found her name, it suited her perfectly, proving to be an amalgam of words that could be a tongue-twister for kids and actors alike, while inspiring thoughts of vast intergalactic speed.

In the *Star Wars* universe, the *Falcon* was fast—fast enough to outrace Imperial cruisers, or so claimed her braggadocious captain, Han Solo. But her speed came at a price. Han and his co-pilot, the Wookiee Chewbacca, put so much effort and credits into tricking out her engines, they neglected maintenance issues in many other areas, such as repairing the damage sustained while making the Kessel Run. In the eyes of the gambler Lando Calrissian, who had owned the freighter before Han, that particular

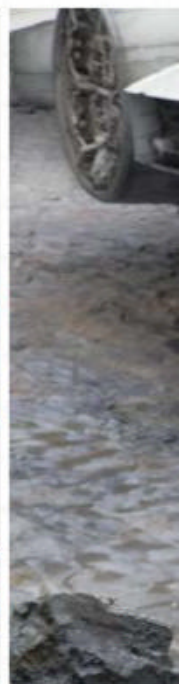
THE *MILLENNIUM FALCON* REMAINS, BY AND LARGE, THE SAME VESSEL SHE WAS WHEN AUDIENCES FIRST ENCOUNTERED HER IN 1977.

event had reduced his beloved *Falcon* to a shell of her previous self.

But Han Solo had dreamed of piloting a ship like the *Falcon* since his days as a scumrat on Corellia and saw her as his opportunity to make an independent living. After years of death-defying adventures, risking their lives on smuggling runs for Jabba the Hutt or taking dangerous passengers to even more dangerous places, Han and Chewbacca came to know their ship by another name. For them, the *Millennium Falcon* was home.

A Bird of Many Sizes

The *Millennium Falcon* took on an even larger role in subsequent *Star Wars* films, necessitating models of many different scales. For *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), Industrial Light & Magic constructed a two-foot model of the *Falcon* to shoot her acrobatic maneuvers through the asteroid field, and another the size of an American quarter for use when she hid on the hull of the Super Star Destroyer *Executor*.



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For exterior scenes of the ship with the cast, carpenters built a complete, full-scale *Falcon* around which the sets for the rebel base on Hoth, the space slug's gullet, and the Cloud City landing platform were constructed. The crew on *Return of the Jedi* (1983) unpacked and re-used this *Falcon* set for the Tatooine sandstorm scene, which ultimately ended up on the cutting room floor in the final version of the film.

Many years later, for the *Star Wars* trilogy Special Edition, the *Millennium Falcon* went digital. ILM rendered a three-dimensional asset of Han Solo's ship that was deployed in additional flight scenes and in post-production corrections of old shots. Observant viewers might have also noticed that a very *Falcon*-like ship made a brief appearance in the third prequel film, *Revenge of the Sith* (2005). This too was a computer-generated model, though it



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remains a mystery as to who was at her helm during this time.

Back to the Future

Though almost four decades had lapsed since the first *Falcon* had been built, the production team of *The Force Awakens*

(2015) were able to track down the ship's original blueprints and re-created both physical and digital replicas of the iconic vessel. This new, actor-sized set—built to last—was used not only for *The Force Awakens*, but also its sequel, *The Last Jedi* (2017), and again in *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018), where the huge prop was redressed to reflect the tastes of an earlier, more sophisticated captain—the one and only Lando Calrissian.

Despite slight differentiations that occur in every film, the *Millennium Falcon* remains, by and large, the same vessel she was when audiences first encountered her in 1977. Not even Luke Skywalker, with all the foresight of a Jedi, could imagine that the ship he called a “hunk of junk” would outlast most of its owners and passengers.

If anything, the *Millennium Falcon* is a survivor—and will continue to be, sailing the stars as long as pilots have the skills to master her finicky controls and enough Spacer's tape to seal her leaking conduits. 🍷



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05 ILM film the original *Falcon* model for *A New Hope*.

06 The *Falcon*'s main hold during Lando's tenure as captain.

07 After decades of Han Solo's ownership, the hold had seen better days.

08 The *Falcon* flees Jakku.

09 Rey (Daisy Ridley) beside the full-size *Falcon* prop.

YODA: A LUMINOUS BEING

— YODA

A Luminous Being Is He

One crowd-pleasing highlight of *The Last Jedi* was Yoda's surprise appearance on Ahch-To. *Insider* traces the off-screen life of the Jedi Master, from concept to screen to collectible.

WORDS: MICHAEL KOGGE



“I

t's not easy being green,” sang Kermit the Frog. The same could be said for Yoda,

the small green Jedi Master who George Lucas proudly introduced to audiences in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Before he made his screen debut, Yoda went through many design iterations and character changes, and he has continued to evolve since then—from his computer-generated incarnation in the *Star Wars* prequels to his animated forms in *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*, not to mention the various items of merchandise that feature takes on his wizened form. What unites them all is that they stem from Lucas' desire to create an amphibian, imminutive, yet wise character with more than a touch of the Kermits about him.

A Pinch of Minch

When George Lucas began outlining the sequel to *Star Wars* in mid-1977, he had a big storytelling problem to solve. He wanted his young hero, Luke Skywalker, to continue to learn about the Force and the Jedi—but Luke's instructor, Obi-Wan “Ben” Kenobi, had died in the first film. That movie had also established that the Jedi themselves were all but extinct, and their raging fire had “gone out of the universe,” according to Grand Moff Tarkin.

So Lucas made an exception—perhaps not *all* the Jedi were dead, after all. Inspired by traditional folk stories where appearances are often deceptive, he created a character known as “the Critter” that might be mistaken for a frog in a fairytale, but who was really a wise Jedi Master. Lucas had ▶

► imagined the critter as short and frog-like, with large eyes, a wide mouth, rubbery skin, floppy feet, and two tiny nostrils in place of a nose. He was also to have the impish, cheeky charm of one of Jim Henson's Muppets, while at the same time being highly realistic, as if he actually existed in the *Star Wars* world and wasn't simply a puppet.

In story conferences with screenwriter Leigh Brackett during November and December 1978, Lucas established that the Critter lived on a bog planet, light years from galactic civilization, and he gave him the name "Minch Yoda"—shortened to "Minch" in the first draft of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Minch acted like a crazy fool in his initial encounters with Luke, until the spirit of Ben Kenobi revealed that Minch was his own former teacher and one of the best of the Jedi. Later drafts of the script by Lawrence Kasdan

changed the creature's name to "Yoda" and described his coloring as blue. Lucas also decided that all of Yoda's lessons to Luke should be in the form of commandments and proverbs, and that his speech patterns should be inverted to lend an archaic, medieval quality to it, testifying to his advanced age of 900 years.

Concept artist Joe Johnston produced numerous sketches of what the Jedi Master could look like. In some drawings, he had fur, in others feathers like Big Bird, and in one he looked like a mischievous Rumpelstiltskin, holding a staff topped with a glowing orb. His skin tone went from Smurfish blue, and then to green. *Empire* director Irvin Kershner suggested that Yoda should have three fingers on each hand, because all the anthropomorphic characters he saw in cartoons had three digits instead of five.

A Wizard Called Oz

To build a realistic Yoda puppet for production, Lucas went to Jim Henson, the most famous puppeteer in the business. Henson accepted Lucas' challenge, since he wanted to harness the special effects techniques Lucas had been pioneering for use on his own upcoming fantasy film, *The Dark Crystal* (1982). However, he was forced to turn down the offer to also perform the new character, owing to his busy schedule. Instead he recommended Frank Oz, the man behind Miss Piggy, to take on the role of Yoda.

Henson's associates worked with *Empire's* talented makeup and creature design team, led by Stuart Freeborn, who was known for creating the furry Chewbacca costume in *Star Wars* and the apes in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The 64-year-old Freeborn based Yoda's face on his own, and added wrinkles inspired by a picture of Albert Einstein. Three distinct versions of Yoda were eventually produced: a full model for long shots, a costume for a short person to wear while walking around on his knees, and a hefty puppet wired with cables that required three people to operate it under the soundstage. Frank Oz performed most of puppet Yoda's actions and expressions, while Wendy Midener handled the controls for Yoda's eyes, and Kathy Millen manipulated Yoda's right hand, smile, and wiggling ears.

Lucas planned to audition other actors to voice Yoda, yet when he saw the filmed footage combined with Oz's dialogue, he stayed with Oz. The realism of Oz's performance so impressed Lucas that he campaigned for Oz to be nominated for an Oscar. As Oz told Henson biographer Brian Jay Jones, "It was acting, not performing."

Though Oz sadly did not receive an Academy nomination, his magical performance as Yoda astounded moviegoers, most of whom forgot or never registered

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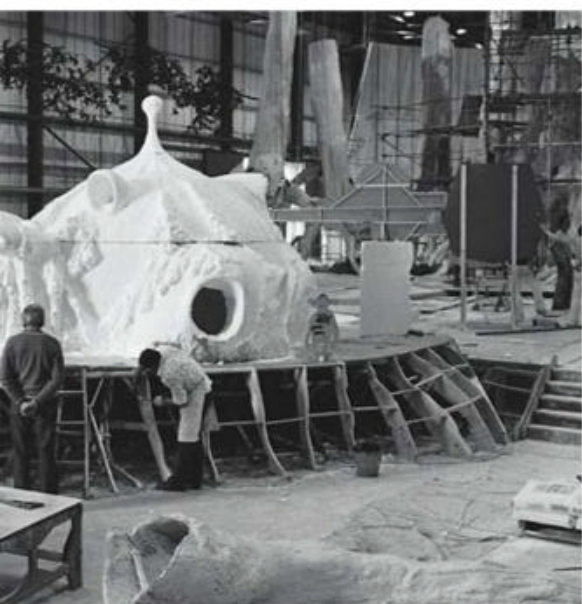
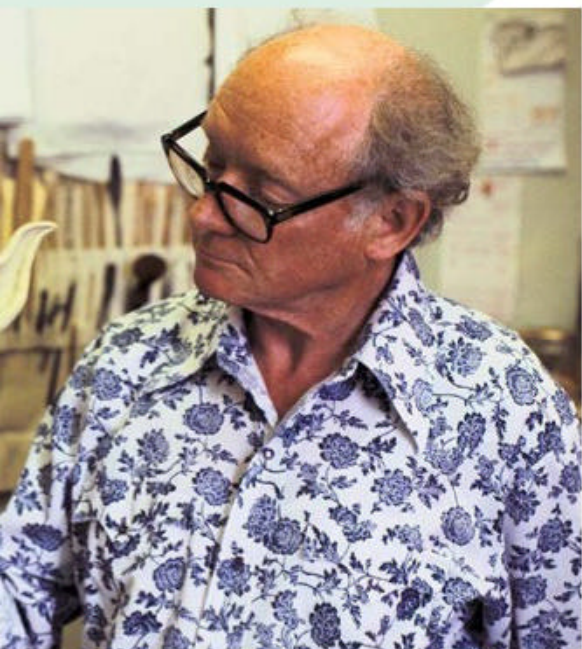
01 (Left) Graham, Stuart, and Kathleen Freeborn, the force behind the Jedi Master.

02 Stuart Freeborn examines an unpainted Yoda head.

03 Yoda's hut was a raised set in order to accommodate the puppet's performers.

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Yoda made his first outing in a television show. The animated micro-series *Star Wars: Clone Wars* premiered on the Cartoon Network in November 2003, and its pilot opened with a cloaked and hooded Yoda riding into battle on a kybuck. The series' creator Genndy Tartakovsky—who had made a splash with his previous animated show *Samurai Jack*—and co-art director Paul Rudish mixed traditional animation with computer effects to achieve their influential style. Main characters were hand-drawn on cels (transparent acetate sheets), while computers helped expand and animate the crowded fight scenes. When realizing Yoda, the pair gave the diminutive Jedi Master a sharper brow, a slight scowl instead of a smile, and more severe facial lines to express a battle-hardened weariness. This was a Yoda who must go to war, but war did not make him happy.

Clone Wars appeared on TV over the span of two years, from 2003 to 2005, and concluded in time to dovetail with the release of *Revenge of the Sith*.

The next time audiences met Yoda was in 2008—first on the big-screen and then again on television—in the midst of the Clone Wars. This time, however, in a fully digitized animated world. For the half-hour continuing TV series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, supervising director Dave Filoni and lead character designer Kilian Plunkett drew inspiration from the similarly titled micro-series' depiction of Yoda, along with Joe Johnston's sketches and Ralph McQuarrie's production paintings for the original trilogy, and the concept art made of Yoda for the prequels. This interpretation of Yoda had bigger eyes, linear creases across his brows, and a thinner mouth able to express a broad range of emotions. By ►

that they were watching a puppet. Oz came back to lead Yoda's puppeteering in 1983's *Return of the Jedi* and 1999's *The Phantom Menace*. For 2017's *The Last Jedi*, creature shop head Neal Scanlan used Freeborn's original Yoda molds to re-create the *Empire* version of the puppet, for which Oz gave advice and once again supplied the voice.

An Evergreen Character

For the second and third *Star Wars* prequels—*Attack of the Clones* (2002) and *Revenge of the Sith* (2005)—Industrial Light & Magic had made many advances in special effects that allowed them to create a completely digital Yoda. This gave Lucas more freedom in writing the scripts and devising new ways to show off Yoda's abilities—such as jumping and spinning in his epic

lightsaber duel with Count Dooku. Rob Coleman's computer animation team tried to match not only the appearance of the old Yoda puppet, but also how it moved, with all its wiggles and jiggles. They created a table of Yoda's facial expressions, from happy to stern, that would help animate the proper emotional responses for digital Yoda in a scene. Most of all, they relied on Frank Oz to bring the now -pixelated character to life with his unique voice.

In between *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*,

04 Yoda (pictured with Stuart Freeborn) has been the creation of many talented artists across four decades.

For 2017's *The Last Jedi*, creature shop head Neal Scanlan used Freeborn's original Yoda molds.

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► the time the final episodes of the series were released in 2014, the hair behind Yoda's ears had grown whiter and bushier, his green skin had turned more pigmented, and his eyelids became more lined to show his age and better match his appearance in *The Empire Strikes Back*. For this incarnation, Yoda was voiced by Tom Kane, who had also played the character in the earlier microseries, and in 2013's *LEGO Star Wars: The Yoda Chronicles* animated series.

With the launch of the next *Star Wars* TV series, *Star Wars Rebels*, the action moved to the time just before the original trilogy, leaving little opportunity to involve Yoda, who by this point is living in exile on Dagobah. However, the power of the Force enabled

05 "Senate Duel," a polystone diorama by Sideshow Collectibles.

06 Yoda as a Hasbro Mighty Mugg, from the new collection for 2018.



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him to make fan-pleasing cameos on two occasions—once as a disembodied voice and once as a vision. On both occasions, his involvement was made all the more special by featuring a guest appearance by the original voice of Yoda, Frank Oz.

With its different animation style from *The Clone Wars*, the *Rebels'* Yoda was much less stylized and more in keeping with his movie look, with smaller eyes and less angular ears. The character also took cues from Ralph McQuarrie's original concept paintings, albeit with blue-green skin and a less oval face. Overall, this new look Yoda seemed to be both older and sprightlier, more of a gnome than a goblin, and exuded kindness

and warmth. He was closer to the Yoda audiences were introduced to in *The Empire Strikes Back*, this wildly impish figure has had time to come to terms with the tragic failings of the past.

Yoda, Yoda Everywhere!

Of course, on screen isn't the only place to see Master Yoda, and the release of *The Empire Strikes Back* in 1980 began a wave of Yoda-themed merchandise, as he soon became as iconic and instantly recognizable as Darth Vader and R2-D2. But Yoda's first action figure did not come out with the initial line of *Empire* toys, as Lucasfilm wanted to keep the mysterious new character a surprise for as long as possible. When manufacturer Kenner did get the green light on the green Jedi, he was launched in his own set of special shipments

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to retailers. He came with a plastic orange snake that wrapped around his neck, a tan cloth robe with a belt, and a replica “gimer” walking stick. And just as Yoda’s look has changed on screen, his action figure went through numerous variations during Kenner’s repackaging of it for *Return of the Jedi*. The snake was re-colored from a bright orange to a more realistic brown, and his skin and his gimer stick were darkened. The name on the card backing was changed to read “Yoda (the Jedi Master)” instead of the rather gnomish “Yoda.”

07 LEGO’s Yoda minifigure was the first to use a new, shorter leg piece.

08 Sideshow Collectible’s “Holiday Yoda” was based on Lucasfilm’s 1981 greeting card.

09 Kenner’s Dagobah Action Playset was released in 1981.

Yoda’s first action figure did not come out with the initial line of *Empire* toys.

In 1981, Kenner produced a Dagobah Action Playset, where—according to the toy company’s catalog—kids could “relive all of Luke Skywalker’s and Yoda’s adventures.” The playset had a foam bog, a central tree trunk that offered access to the Jedi Master’s hut, and the cave where Luke seemingly encountered Darth Vader. Two included storage containers could be “levitated” by means of a lever, while the action figures shown on the box were, of course, sold separately.

Yoda merchandise would not be limited to poseable figurines, either. The costuming company Ben Cooper added Yoda to their *Star Wars* costumes line in 1980, selling a plastic mask and a vinyl one-piece smock that no doubt terrified some trick-or-treaters. Yoda’s gentle persona also made him an ideal teddy bear. For years plush Yoda dolls have been sold in all shapes and cuddly sizes, some even “talk” and offer snippets of Jedi wisdom. And younger children alive around the release of *Revenge of the Sith* might have been fed their food wearing a bib that showed Yoda with a quote from *Empire*: “Good food, hmm?”

Yoda’s popularity reaches well beyond the children’s

market, too. He took center stage in his own 2004 novel, *Yoda: Dark Rendezvous*, by author Sean Stewart, and has been a staple character in comics, most notably in *Yoda’s Secret War* (issues #26-30 of Marvel’s *Star Wars*), which recounts an untold tale of a young Yoda. Avid book-lenders in the 1980s might remember Yoda promoting reading for the American Library Association in the now classic poster showing the wise Jedi Master clutching a book, with the caption: “READ—and the Force is with you.”

For those who wanted a replica Yoda in their homes, Sideshow Collectibles created a life-size Yoda statue that stands 32 inches tall, accompanied by a lizard-like morp critter. Gentle Giant also offered many of its own life-size re-creations, most notably in 2006, with a Yoda statue wielding his lightsaber.

After almost 40 years of fame, today Yoda ranks as one of the most recognizable characters in the *Star Wars* pantheon, and his surprise cameo role in *The Last Jedi* generated cheers of joy in theaters around the world. It goes to show that it might not be easy being green, but being different brings its own esteem. 🌿



MASTER AND COMMANDER

This summer, Marvel's latest comic-book miniseries, *Star Wars: Jedi of the Republic: Mace Windu*, sheds new light on the fan-favorite Jedi Master and clone army general. *Insider* spoke to writer Matt Owens to find out more.

H

e's the man who took out Jango Fett and almost bested Palpatine in battle. First

seen in 1999's *The*

Phantom Menace, Mace Windu was one of the breakout characters of the prequel movies, and went on to cement his popularity in *The Clone Wars* animated show television.

Now he's back, fronting his own comic series, written by Matt

Owens (*Elektra*), with art by Denys Cowan (*Black Panther*, *The Question*). We asked Matt what *Mace Windu* has in store for the much-loved Jedi Master.

PROFILE MATT OWENS

Having started out writing for TV on shows like *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and Netflix's *Luke Cage*, Matt Owens is a newcomer to comics. His debut, *Elektra*, was published by Marvel in February, with art by Alec Morgan.

How did you come to write *Mace Windu*?

Matt Owens: Ever since we started working together on the *Elektra* comic, Axel Alonso [Marvel's editor-in-chief] has told me he enjoyed working with me and wanted to keep the

relationship going in the future.

One day he called me to say that he had a couple of new opportunities he wanted to discuss and one of them was a Mace Windu series. He asked me to come up with an idea, so I did and here we are!

What's the comic about?

Mace Windu is a five-issue Marvel miniseries in which the title character finds himself in the midst of a galactic war at the same time that he's having a crisis of faith. He believes devoutly in the Force, but now he's in a dangerous new role of army general. So we see him fulfilling his duties on the front lines, and questioning the role of the Jedi at this time. That struggle is front and center in the story.

So we're joining him in the heart of the Clone Wars?

Yes, just after the Battle of Geonosis from *Attack of the Clones*. *The Clone Wars* animation explored that period really well on TV, but there's still so much great stuff

► to mine! I like working in an area where we know the outcome of a lot of the stories—the fun part is seeing the intricacies of how we get there. We know that Mace dies, we know the Empire wins, but it’s a journey that people still want to go on, despite knowing the final destination.

How does Mace balance his duties with this crisis of faith?

It’s not easy! The Jedi are like atomic bombs: they have so much power, but they really don’t want to use it. Mace is a masterful warrior who doesn’t relish fighting. Such use of his power goes against his code, but if he doesn’t use it, what will become of the Republic? As a member of the Jedi Council, he is under pressure because he is a leader. He’s forced into an uncomfortable situation where he is doing something he doesn’t entirely agree with for what he believes is ultimately the greater good. But he has to be sure of himself because he has so many others looking to him for direction.

It sounds like a rich seam of material for a writer to mine!

It is! You need conflict, both internal and external, to tell a compelling story. That clash of ideals is what interested me most about this story. People watch the prequel trilogy with the benefit of foresight, going, “The enemy is right next to you! How do you not see it?” This story shows how it’s not that easy when you’re in the moment. Mace is no fool, and hopefully by the end of the miniseries people will understand why he went on fighting, even with his reservations, and why it took him so long to act on them.

01 Mace isn’t the only Jedi featured. Kit Fisto returns with two new Jedi (see right).

“We will see Mace as a leader and a warrior, but also as a man with beliefs and fears. He’s three-dimensional.”

So it sets things up for Mace as we see him in *The Clone Wars* and *Revenge of the Sith*?

It helps inform how he got to that point, yeah. He’s always been a character people have wanted to explore further and get to know. In this story we will see him as a leader and a warrior, but also as a man with his own beliefs and fears. He’s always been a three-dimensional character, now we’re really fleshing out those aspects.

What new characters do you introduce in the comic?

There are two new Jedi introduced, named Prosset Dibs and Rissa Mano. I still can’t believe Lucasfilm let me create new characters! Prosset is a Miraluka. He’s incredibly observant and has a bit of a sharp tongue. Rissa is a Devaronian, and a newly appointed Jedi Knight. She has a mind for engineering and likes to tinker with vehicles. Both characters are handpicked by Mace for an important mission, which gives us new insight into Mace as a leader. I won’t say too much, but Rissa is ecstatic to be working with him. She has a bit of a fangirl moment, as anyone would!

Is there a new villain, too?

Yes, and he is possibly my favorite new character. He’s a mercenary droid called AD-W4, who is hired by the Separatists, and he doesn’t care about the war or the Jedi: he only cares about getting paid. He doesn’t understand why anyone would follow the Jedi Code, or any religion for that matter. He wonders why any lifeform would need such a philosophical safety blanket to fall back on,

or to tell them how to live their lives. Those are interesting traits to have in any droid, but as an embodiment of the science versus faith debate, he’s the perfect foil for the emotional journey that Mace is on. He’s a formidable opponent both mentally and physically. He’s got some tools that make for great combat prowess.

What returning characters should we look forward to?

I asked for every conceivable Jedi under the sun for this book! I wanted to dive into a lot of different characters because I’m such a fan of them all. But most of all, I really wanted to explore Mace’s relationship with Kit Fisto, because they are together when they meet their end, and it always seemed to me that Kit was someone Mace really trusted. So you will see a lot of instances, both in battle and in philosophy, where Kit has Mace’s back. And in the tumultuous time when this story is set, that kind of support is invaluable to Mace. You will see why Mace and the Council hold Kit in such high regard.

Does the story introduce any new worlds?

Of course! There’s the jungle planet Hissrich, which has its own sentient species. One of my favorite *Star Wars* worlds is Felucia from *Revenge of the Sith*, so I wanted to create something along those lines, but even denser and darker. It’s an environment that the Jedi really have to factor into their mission, with near-perpetual night, bioluminescent flora, and lots of other things lurking in the darkness. It will test the Jedi from the moment they set foot on it! ►





► **That must be a lot of fun for Denys Cowan. What does his art bring to your story?**

Denys really hits what the core of the scenes are about and elevates them. It's a gift to be working with someone so talented. Having worked with so many different writers before—since before I was born, even—he has a wonderful way of bringing out great detail in every panel. Being able to see his process has been awe-inspiring. I have to remind myself at times that I'm not just here to gawk at his art. We have work to do, too!

Your own background is more based in TV (Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *Luke Cage*) than comics. How has that influenced *Mace Windu*?

I've been lucky enough to write for a number of awesome characters on TV and in comics: Luke Cage, Quake, Ghost Rider, Elektra—and now I get to add Mace Windu to that list! My experiences have definitely taught me what makes a character compelling, and how drive and conflict make for stories worth telling. On our show, Luke Cage is a very strong and mostly silent type, and that describes Mace well, too.

The live-action Mace Windu was played by Samuel L. Jackson. Are there any lines of dialogue in the comic that you'd particularly like to hear him speak?

I'd kill for him to say any of the lines from the comic! There's a moment right before a fight where Mace tells his opponent, "I'll show you why they call us Jedi Masters!" I can imagine him saying that. Also, one of my favorite lines in the series: "The just do not have the need to hire mercenaries."

There's no mistaking your passion for *Star Wars*. Has the saga always been in your blood?

It has always been a part of my life, yeah. From watching the original trilogy with my dad, to playing videogames like *Dark Forces*, it's been a constant presence and a



huge influence. I even named my pet turtle Princess Leia because I had such a huge crush on her as a kid! She had a cool robe and great hair, and could use a blaster and didn't take smack from anyone. I always clung to Lando as a character, too. Not only because he was black, but because he was so suave and complicated. And because he wore a dope cape!

What's the best thing about writing *Mace Windu*?

Mace is hardcore! As a writer, he gives me the ability to write cool lines and have him do cool stuff

02 One of Mace's defining moments: taking on Jango Fett on Geonosis (see left).

03 The series will see Mace's beliefs tested and he'll need to call on all the help he can get.

that I never get to do in real life. So there's definitely an element of wish fulfillment in there for me. But Mace is also an incredibly smart person. Despite being one of the greatest Jedi warriors, he's not just some blunt instrument. I like how much of a layered person he is. It's been a real privilege to explore that. 🙌

MORTIS

PLANET OF THE FORCE



Journey to an ethereal realm beyond the stars, where the balance of the Force rests in the hands of three powerful beings—and the guilt-ridden Anakin Skywalker.

WORDS: MEGAN CROUSE



The Mortis Trilogy

Star Wars: The Clone Wars' three-episode trip to Mortis forms a key part of the show's third season, first broadcast in January 2011. Over the course of "Overlords," "Altar of Mortis," and "Ghosts of Mortis," viewers have the satisfaction of seeing familiar *Star Wars* themes played out in microcosm, while also gaining new perspective on the meaning of those themes.

More recently, a tantalizing glimpse of the arc's enigmatic trio of Force-wielders can be seen in the *Star Wars Rebels* Season Four trailer. So who are they, and what is their story?

3.15 OVERLORDS

The journey to Mortis begins with a 2,000-year-old Jedi distress signal. Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Ahsoka Tano each follow it to the mysterious planet, where all of them experience visions. Obi-Wan sees his former master, Qui-Gon Jinn, who reminds him of Anakin's destiny as the Chosen One. Ahsoka sees a vision of her future self, warning her to leave her master, Anakin. Skywalker sees his mother and expresses his guilt for murdering the tribe of Tusken Raiders that was holding her captive. He soon realizes that the vision was sent by the Son, one of the three strange Force-wielders that live on Mortis. He then confronts another of these beings, the Father, only to learn that he intended to test whether Anakin truly is the Chosen One.

In the test, Skywalker calls upon the power of Mortis and subdues the Daughter and the Son, who represent the light side and the dark side of the Force respectively. The Father, taking this as a valediction of the prophecy, invites Anakin to replace him as the ruler of Mortis. Anakin refuses, still haunted by the guilt he feels over losing his mother.

3.16 ALTAR OF MORTIS

The Son captures Ahsoka and infects her with dark side influence. When Anakin tries to save her, she attacks him, claiming that she doesn't need a teacher any longer. Meanwhile, Obi-Wan meets with the Father and the Daughter. The Daughter then leads him to an altar, where he retrieves the Dagger of Mortis, which can control the Son.

The long-running conflict between the Daughter and the Son erupts into outright battle. The Son's violence leads further than he expected, and he attempts to stab the Father, but strikes the Daughter instead. The dark side appears to be victorious, but the Daughter still has a little more light to give. As her last act, she restores the life-force the Son has taken from Ahsoka Tano, removing his dark side influence as well. But the Son remains a threat, and now wants to leave the planet.

3.17 GHOSTS OF MORTIS

With the Daughter gone, Mortis is out of balance. The Son leads Anakin to the Well of the Dark Side—a deep chasm where the Force is strong—and shows him visions of his own dark future. Anakin is convinced to help the Son kill the Father in exchange for the power to avert the destiny he has seen.

The Father confronts Anakin and wipes his knowledge of the future, freeing him from the Son's dark side influence. Anakin attacks the Son, but even with help from Ahsoka and Obi-Wan, the powerful embodiment of the dark side proves to be too strong. Seeing that the Son is about to be victorious, the Father takes his own life with the Dagger of Mortis. His last words to the Son are an assertion of victory: "Your strength runs through me. This way, I take your power."

The Son, who is overcome with remorse, makes his peace with the Father as he lays dying. Anakin takes this opportunity to kill the Son, and, with his dying breath, the Father then proclaims that Anakin has brought balance to Mortis and is the Chosen One. The planet fades away. Anakin, Ahsoka, and Obi-Wan find themselves back on board their ship as if nothing has happened.



T

he history of the Jedi takes in its fair share of mysterious worlds, but few are as strange as the legendary planet of Mortis. During the Clone Wars, Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Ahsoka Tano are drawn into a battle there that seems to reflect the conflict going on throughout the galaxy. As the dark side grows stronger on Mortis, so it grows more likely that the Clone Wars will sweep across the entire galaxy and that Anakin will fall, resulting in his grim fate as the mutilated Darth Vader. *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* tells this tale in a three-episode arc, and provokes questions about the nature of the Force along the way—most pertinently, what does

“The history of the Jedi takes in its fair share of mysterious worlds, but few are as strange as the legendary planet of Mortis.”

it really mean to “bring balance” to the Force?

Planet Of The Force

The Mortis arc introduces a planet and a group of adept Force-wielders that are unlike any seen in *Star Wars* before or since. The Father, the Daughter, and the Son are Force users who became so powerful that they’ve removed themselves entirely from the galaxy at large. They are the very embodiment of balance, light, and dark, and are metaphors for all we have understood about the Force since Anakin was revealed as the Chosen One, destined to bring balance to the galaxy. Yet the planet where they reside is not in balance, being a confusing realm of mythic sites and very powerful artifacts where light and dark seem to be in physical turmoil, and our every expectation is upended.

Following the duo’s arrival on the planet Mortis, Obi-Wan calls it an “intersection” of the Force, a place infused with Force energy. A little later, Obi-Wan also notes that the planet itself “is the Force,” allowing Anakin to tap into it. The planet contains several locations specifically tied to the dark side: the Well of the Dark Side and the Altar of Mortis, which holds the Dagger of Mortis that can kill the immortal Force wielders. The well channels the darkness of the Force. The Father’s power is yet another valuable property of the planet: on his death, the floating rocks and beautiful crystal above his monastery come crashing down to the ground.

Devoid of animals, the planet instead overflows with plants in a strange, chaotic life cycle where the seasons change with the time of day. Daytime is beautiful, but

every night brings violent storms and withers the leaves. While the planet seems to have two moons and a clear blue sky during the day, suggesting that it exists in normal space, the Jedi do not arrive nor leave by means of conventional space travel. Instead, their passage is always obscured, with the Jedi waking from unconsciousness to find themselves unexpectedly on Mortis and, later, back on their ship in space.

Meet The Family

The first of the three strange Force-wielders the Jedi meet on Mortis is the Daughter, a cryptic woman who speaks as if the Jedi should already know who she is. Like the Bendu in *Star Wars Rebels*, the Daughter speaks of her manifestation of the Force as eternal: “We are the middle, beginning, and the end.”

Both the Daughter and Son can shape shift into different animal forms. The Daughter’s is a graceful, feathered gryphon. She’s also very formidable in her human form, capable of using Force telekinesis. She succinctly describes her own nature as well as the Son’s: “My nature is to do what is selfless, but my brother’s is to do what is selfish.”

When we meet the eerie Son, who represents the Force’s dark side, he immediately takes an interest in Anakin. He is both treacherous and uncontrolled, appearing disguised as Shmi Skywalker and mimicking Anakin himself. Later, when his trickery doesn’t achieve what he wants, he becomes violent and tries to kill the Father, for whom he harbors a deep hatred.

As an embodiment of the dark side, the Son can make his appeals sound convincing and reasonable.

“The Son’s Force abilities include powerful lightning, a monstrous gargoyle form, and the ability to draw power from conflict.”

He tempts Anakin Skywalker with the dream of bringing peace to the galaxy just as Darth Sidious will do later. The Son also speaks in length of the Force as a matter of balance: “Light and dark, as if there is one without the other,” says the Son, continuing to assert: “I have done what is right, or what is wrong—depending on your point of view.”

The Son’s Force abilities include powerful lightning, a monstrous gargoyle form, and the ability to draw power from conflict.

As both the Daughter and the Son appear in guises that represent the light side and the dark side of the Force, so the Father’s presence represents balance. He isn’t certain if Anakin is the Chosen One, but has the means to test the theory—balance being a vital part of any equitable trial. The Father wants to keep his children from fighting, and we discover that it is he who has brought Anakin to the planet, in the hope that peace can be restored.

In fine Jedi tradition, the Father does not believe that the Son is lost to evil forever, despite having embraced the dark side. However, their conflict results in ending

the Father’s life and breaking the Force-wielders’ hold on Mortis.

Questions And Answers

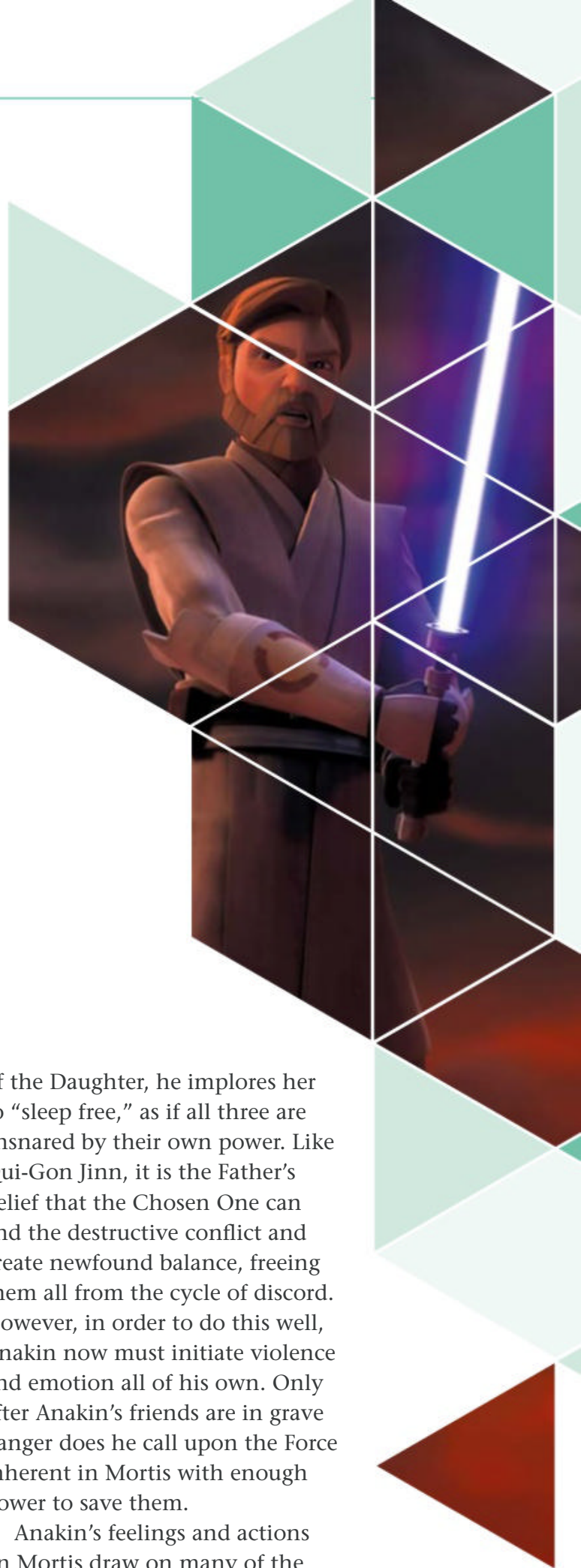
Together, the three Force-wielders play out their philosophy of the Force like actors on a stage, as they embody aspects of the light and the dark while also existing as true individuals with their own traits and flaws. The Father tends to be too passive, the Son too furious. The Daughter’s sacrifice is perhaps too selfless—giving up her own life force to save Ahsoka—denying her further agency in this epic struggle between light and dark. All three help Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin, and Ahsoka see new facets of their own journeys, and push them to decide whether or not they are following the correct path. By the end of the story, both the characters and the audience have been made to face three important questions about the Force: Is Skywalker the Chosen One? What does it actually mean to bring balance to the Force? And does the Force as a whole tend to lean toward good, evil, or balance?

As the main representative of balance—with all things tending toward harmony but subject to imbalance and discord—the Father tells Anakin that Mortis is “strong with the Force; darkness has no hold here.” But he also recognizes that the conflict between his two children will cause aftershocks throughout the galaxy.

The Father seems to feel somewhat trapped by the cycle itself. When he visits the tomb

of the Daughter, he implores her to “sleep free,” as if all three are ensnared by their own power. Like Qui-Gon Jinn, it is the Father’s belief that the Chosen One can end the destructive conflict and create newfound balance, freeing them all from the cycle of discord. However, in order to do this well, Anakin now must initiate violence and emotion all of his own. Only after Anakin’s friends are in grave danger does he call upon the Force inherent in Mortis with enough power to save them.

Anakin’s feelings and actions on Mortis draw on many of the themes that will later contribute to his fall: his guilt surrounding his inability to protect his loved ones; a need for complete control in his life after much of his childhood was lost to slavery; and his desire to truly know the future through his prophetic visions. “Always in motion is the future,” Yoda will tell Luke Skywalker many years later. The Mortis arc shows Anakin’s struggles to rectify his faith in this shifting future with



- ▶ the visions that seem to show him a certain, immutable truth that he desperately wants to avoid.

Ironically, it is Anakin's vision of his future as Darth Vader that leads him to join the Son on his dark path, just as his later attempts to save Padmé Amidala's life will lead to his subservience to Darth Sidious. Events on Mortis convince the Father that Anakin Skywalker is indeed the Chosen One, while also opening wounds that make his eventual path more certain than it ever was before.

Across the three episodes, it is Obi-Wan who proves most flexible

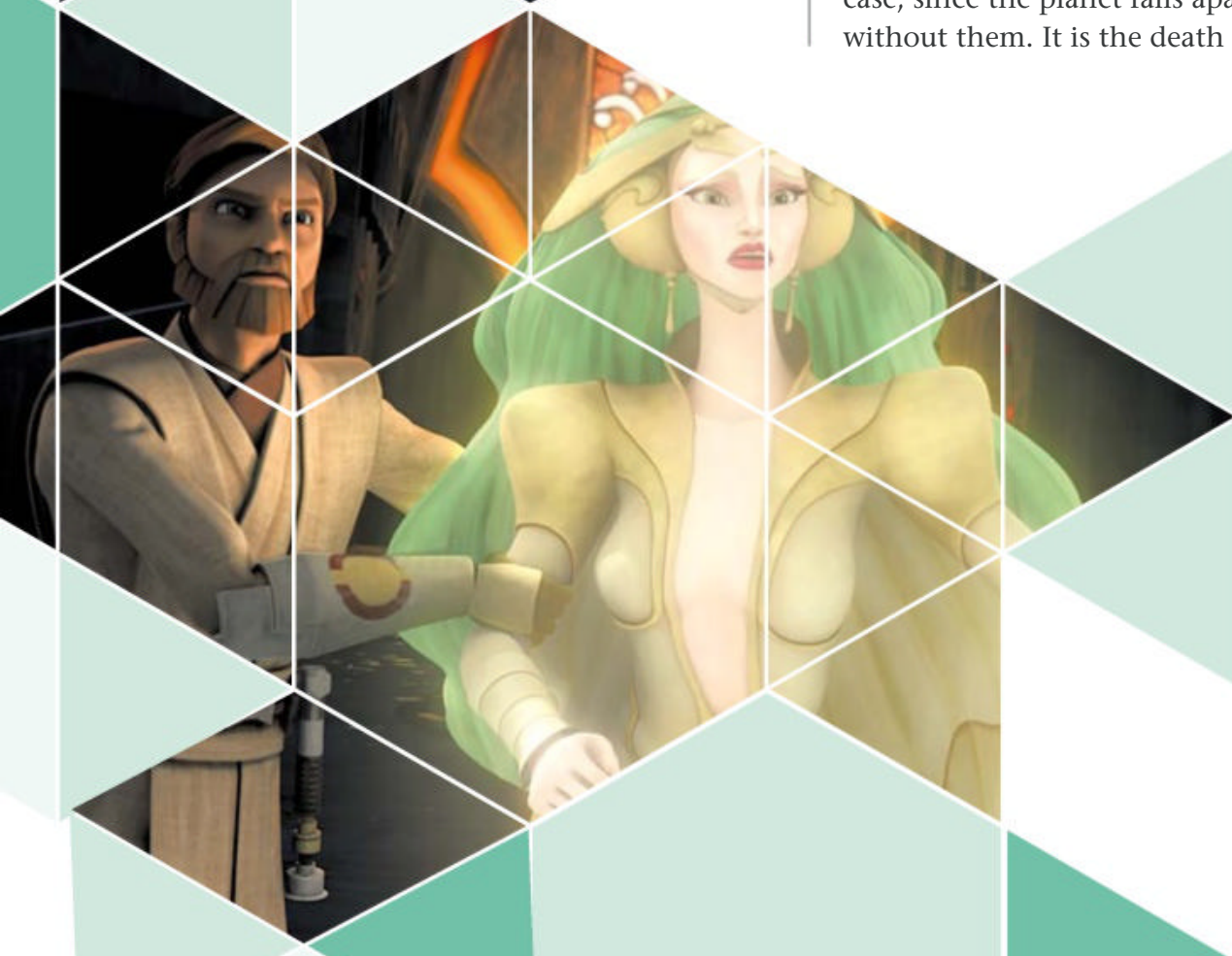
“Ironically, of course, it is Anakin’s vision of his future as Darth Vader that leads him to join the Son on his dark path.”

in his interpretation of the Force. At first, he believes that the trio shouldn't get involved, but by the end of the arc he says: “The way I see it, if we were not supposed to interfere, Ahsoka and I would not be here in the first place!” When the stakes are raised, he goes to help.

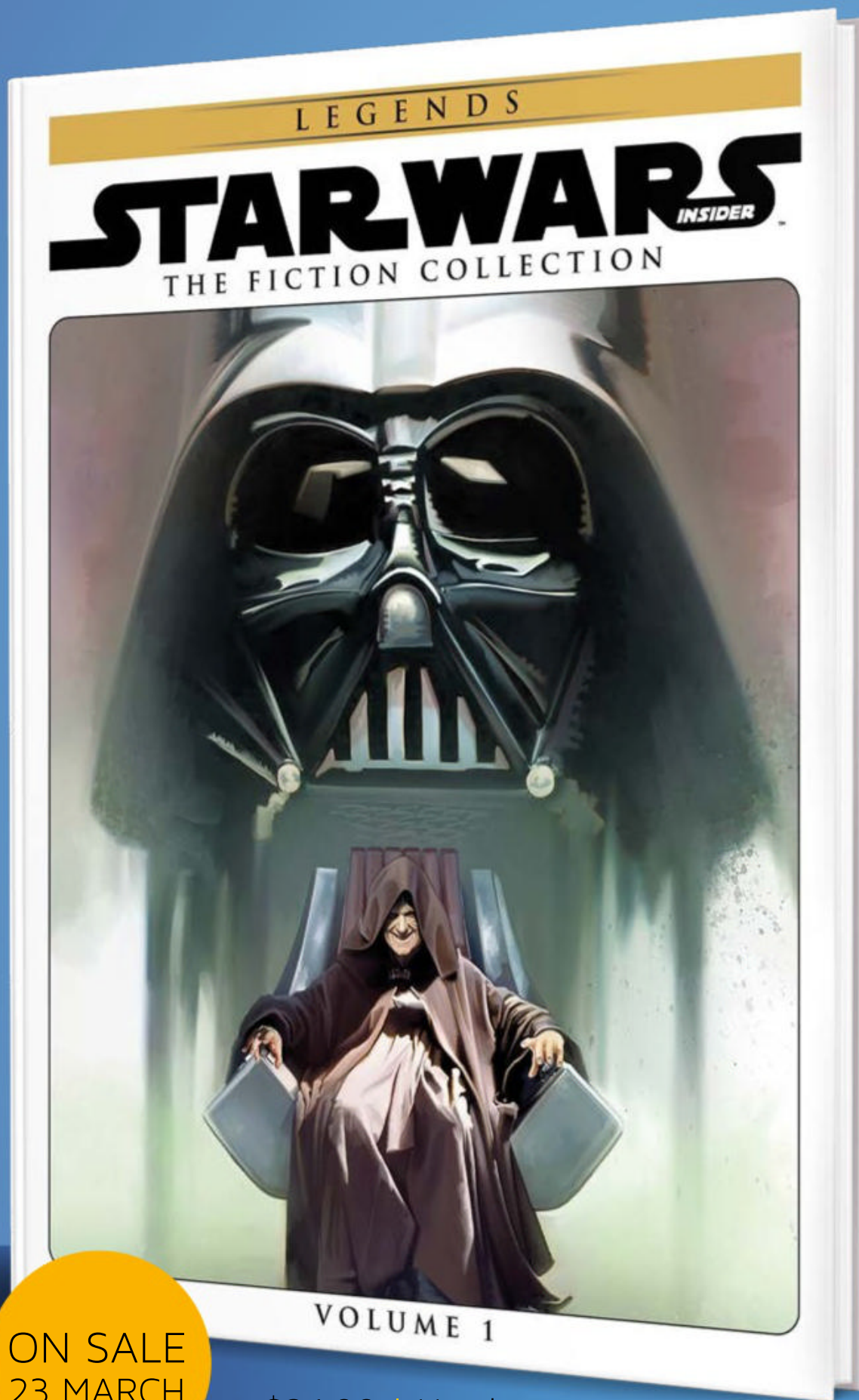
Anakin Skywalker's ultimate fate on Mortis is to witness the death of all three of its Force-wielding inhabitants. Does this mean that balance is only possible when none of them are left? That doesn't seem to be the case, since the planet falls apart without them. It is the death of

the Daughter which causes the Son to become power-hungry and reveal his bitter rage against his Father. Without the light side, then there truly can be no balance, and without balance, there can, of course, be no Father. Taking away any one element causes the edifice to crumble. In truth, even though the Father did not see it, the never ending conflict—with neither light nor dark ever having the upper hand for long—was in itself a kind of dynamic balance. It is only the belief in a Chosen One who can impose a static equilibrium that initiates death and decay.

But that is just one interpretation. After leaving Mortis, our heroes themselves struggle to explain what has happened to them, showing how the Force remains mysterious even to its most dedicated students. What is certain is that the Mortis arc introduced layers of complexity and nuance to what had been portrayed previously as a “hokey old religion”—a binary symbol of good versus evil that drove the Skywalker saga to its conclusion (as was) in *Return of the Jedi*. Through indelibly fascinating, if at times inscrutable, exploration, we learn that the Force is so much more than we had possibly imagined. It is exciting and perhaps surprising that its potential to inform many more unexpected stories remains so far tantalizingly untapped. 🌌

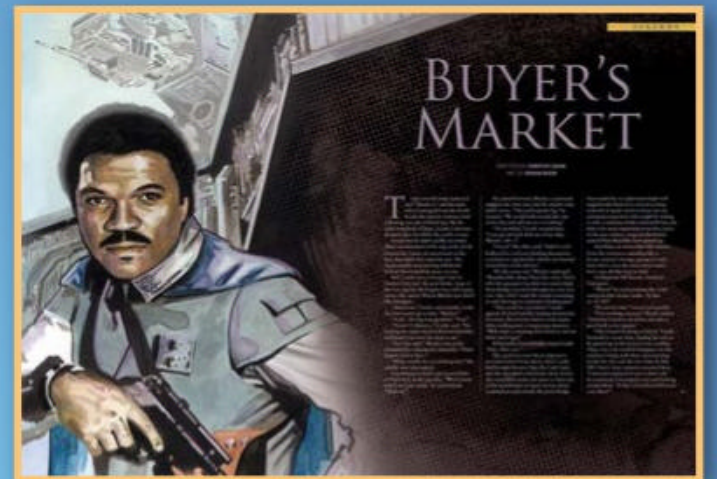


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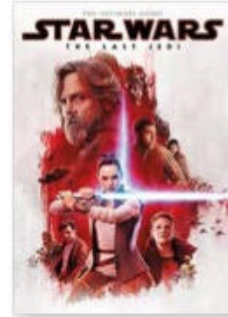
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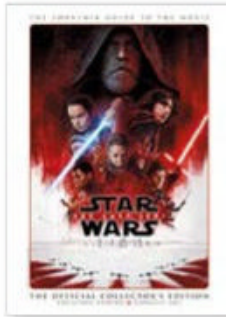


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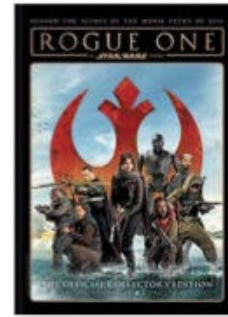
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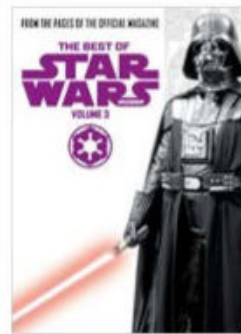
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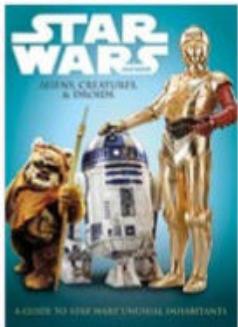
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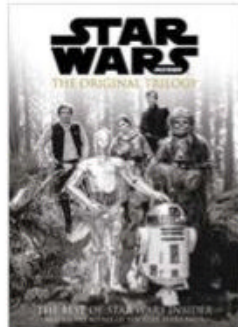
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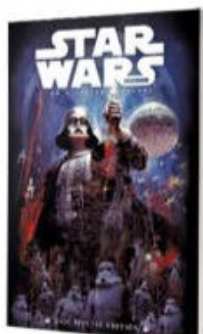
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